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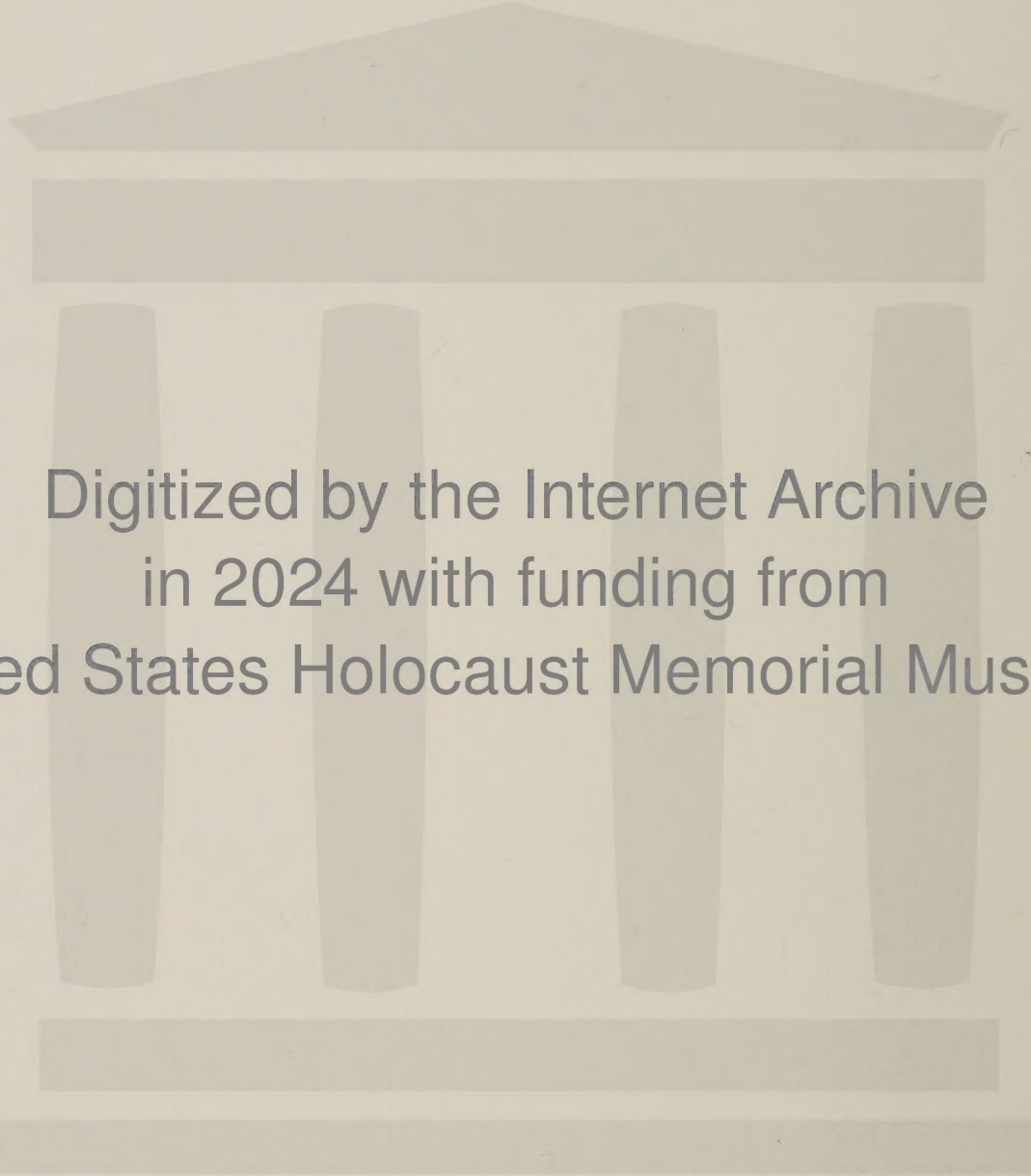


VIA ALBANIA

A PERSONAL ACCOUNT

**JOHANNA JUTTA NEUMANN
(GERECHTER)**





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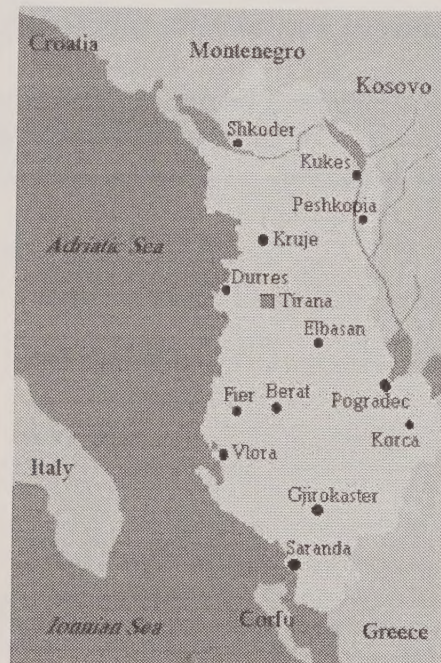
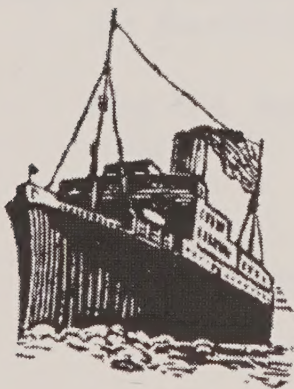
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VIA ALBANIA

A PERSONAL ACCOUNT

**JOHANNA JUTTA NEUMANN
(GERECHTER)**



Via Albania/Johanna Jutta Neumann (Gerechter)
Autobiographical - A personal experience

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*In dedication to the memory of my dear
parents זל who through their constant
love and devoted care made it possible
for me to enjoy as normal a childhood
as was feasible under the circumstances.
Their constant strife was to give me the
feeling of security and warmth, even if
the odds were against them.*

*Their memory is alive; they constitute
the foundation of our wonderful family.*

*May G'd have granted them Peace in his
Kingdom!*

יהא זכרם ברוך !

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Foreword

While the original book was written in 1983, I found it necessary to revise the text, correct certain dates, events and individuals' names.

The necessity to make these corrections, became clear to me once my old, childhood friend, Erika Permeti Toptani and I were reunited in 1993. We had not seen or heard from each other since my parents and I left Albania in September, 1945. It was really a miracle that after so many years, 48 years, to be exact, we would meet in Rome, Italy and continue our friendship where we left off.

It is due to this reunion and the many memories we share, the many hard times we lived through together, the many mutual friends and acquaintances we had, that with her help I was able to revise my memories and ensure greater accuracy.

Furthermore, it was Erika who found Edip Pilku in Tirana and gave me his address, so that I was able to contact him. As a result of corresponding with Edip and obtaining his cooperation, I was able to gather the necessary information to pass on to Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.

It had been for many years a great burden to me, not to be able to have Njazi and Liza Lotte Pilku honored and elevated to the status of **RIGHTEOUS AMONG THE NATIONS**. They deserved the recognition for their courage and friendship which they showed us, despite the great danger they placed themselves in.

Unfortunately this honor had to be awarded posthumously. I feel that through my efforts to obtain this recognition, I have thanked Njazi and Lisa Lotte Pilku, also on behalf of my parents. I also hope that the Pilku children and grandchildren are aware of the fact that their parents were very good and courageous people. There is no doubt that without the help of the Pilkus, my parents and I, most probably would not have survived the German occupation of Albania.

The ceremony to honor several Albanian families, including the family Pilku, took place on January 27, 1998 in the city of Librazhd. The Israeli medals were presented to the children of the Righteous Among Nations. Edip Pilku accepted the award on behalf of his parents.

Mr. Tibor Schlosser, the secretary of the Embassy of Israel in Italy, who had come especially for this purpose to Albania, said, among other things in the course of his presentation, "he who saves one life, it is as though he has saved an entire world."

Another reason for the revision is that during a visit to Hamburg in 1996, I had the opportunity to visit the archives and found many interesting documents relating to the lives of my ancestors in Hamburg during the last 200 years. Some of these documents are included in the appendices of this book.

Now that I have come to the end of this book, I can only hope that I have conveyed a message to my children and grandchildren. A message that even in the darkest of times there are always those who rise to the top of human endeavor and who, despite the danger to their own life and that of their families, will come to the help of others. Furthermore, I hope that I have been able to convey the outstanding qualities of my parents, who despite the difficulties they experienced during the war years, maintained a warm home, practiced their religion as much as possible and enabled me to have a childhood which was culturally and religiously rich. They were never bitter!

I sincerely hope that I kept my personal account as accurate as it was possible and that I did not hurt or harm anyone inadvertently. The main purpose of this book is to leave, for future generations, one more personal account of events as experienced by our family, so that G'd forbid, these events would never be forgotten.

A special thanks goes to my children for their encouragement to make me write this book, and to Eli for helping me to complete this revision.

Silver Spring, Maryland - June 2000

Albania – Land of the Eagles

(from the Internet at www.albania.co.uk)

Albania is a country in South-Eastern Europe, in the West of the Balkan peninsula, between the geographical coordinates : 39 16' latitude and 42 39' longitude. Albania is almost midway between Equator and the North Pole, and covers a surface of 28.748 km².

The overall length of the border-line of the Republic of Albania is 1094 km, out of which 657 km are land-border, 316 km sea-border, 48 km river-border and 73 km lake-border.

The Republic of Albania, in the North and North-East borders with the Former Federative Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro), on the East with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and in the South and South-East with the Republic of Greece. On the West, Albania is washed by the Adriatic and Ionian seas.

Albania is mostly a mountainous country.

The average altitude is 708 m, i.e. two times higher than that of Europe.

Albania is included in the humid sub-tropical zone of the Northern hemisphere, and it belongs to the Mediterranean climatic zone.

Introduction

It had never occurred to me to put anything on paper, concerning myself, my family, or our experiences during the war years. The idea to document my experiences was initiated by Eli as a result of lectures on the Holocaust he had attended at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. When I discussed this idea with the other children they, too, were in favor of this suggestion. Never having written anything before, I was very hesitant until I attended the final ceremony of the Holocaust Survivors' Reunion at the Western Wall in Jerusalem in June of 1981. It was the emotional experience of that evening which made it clear to me that no matter how insignificant one's experiences were in relation to the overall tragedy, they still represent a link in the history of European Jewry. A major community which once existed would be forgotten if it were not for personal accounts. Only personal accounts can humanize these facts.

This, then, will be the story of my family, which hopefully will in some small way help my children learn about their ancestors and the lives they had led.

In trying to clarify the various family relationships and wanting to give those who are no longer alive a proper place in these memoirs, I have included a Family Tree. It was with great difficulty that I was able to compile the Tree as much as I did, especially since on my father's side of the family, there are very few left, who are able to help me.

I have also included a map of Albania to help the reader to follow our odyssey.

Family Background

My father, Siegbert Zodek Gerechter, was born in Posen on October 14, 1895. His father was Louis Jehuda Gerechter¹ and his mother was Anna Chana Gerechter, nee Chaim². They had four children, Sophie, Siegbert, Paula and Arthur. Grandfather Gerechter was a very wealthy merchant, who owned a clothing-manufacturing establishment in Posen. The extended family was very large and many members of the family found employment in his factory.

Sophie unfortunately contracted diphtheria, which in those days was almost always fatal. She was born in 1894 and died at the age of 11, in 1905. Tante Paula, whom my children knew, lived to be 82 years old when she died on January 15, 1979, in Berlin. Her husband, Leo Arndt, died in 1963. They never had children and both are buried in Berlin.

Arthur, like my father, was very talented in the art of painting. He was an early Zionist, belonging to the Mizrachi movement and already then was interested in settling in Palestine. When World War I broke out, my father volunteered for the army at the age of almost 19. His brother, on the other hand, did not want to have anything to do with the army. He was drafted during the last year of the war and sent to the French front, where he fell on October 25, 1918. The exact place where he died is called Valenciennes-Maubeuge, Flanders. He was buried there at the military cemetery.

Although my grandfather was a religious as well as a learned man, he was also a German patriot. The fact that my father had been an officer in the German army in a machine gun division had received the Iron Cross and had served a full four years on the front lines, was a matter of great pride to my grandfather. This was also the reason my father received, in 1935, the so-called Hitler-Cross, honoring frontline fighters. What an irony!

When the war finally ended there was a call for volunteers who were ready to fight against the Bolsheviks in Russia. My father volunteered and, therefore, was not demobilized until February of 1919. His mother had come to Berlin to welcome him back and, due to poor travel conditions, his arrival from Russia was delayed by many hours. My grandmother contracted a severe influenza with serious complications caused by an epidemic of the Spanish Influenza, then raging throughout Europe. She died only days after his return on February 17, 1919, in Posen. My father, having opted for German not Polish citizenship, could not obtain an entry visa to Poland in order to attend her funeral. The tragic events in the family were not yet at an end. Germany had lost the war and, therefore, certain parts of Germany were handed over to the victors according to the Versailles Treaty. Posen had been part of Prussia and was separated after 1919 from the rest of Prussia by the Polish Corridor. The population of Posen had to choose between remaining German citizens or becoming Poles; the former had to leave Posen, the latter could remain. As I have already mentioned, the Gerechter family were German patriots

¹Jehuda ben Yaakov, born March 14, 1866, in Jarotschin, Province of Posen; died May 14, 1936.

²Chana bat Hachower Joseif, born November 8, 1870, in Nake, Province of Posen; died February 17, 1919.

and, therefore, of course remained German citizens. The new Polish Government confiscated all properties, and my grandfather was given 50 percent of his capital upon leaving Posen.

Tante Paula was already married and lived in Berlin. Both my father and grandfather settled in Berlin as well. Grandfather Gerechter married his second wife, Recha Blum, the sister of Rabbi Blum of Emden, sometime in 1920. She was a very religious and a kind woman; I remember her well. My grandfather died in Berlin on May 14, 1936, and Grandmother Recha was deported from Berlin sometime during the latter part of 1941 or early 1942. The last postcard we received from her was dated October 14, 1941. The postcard arrived in Albania and was addressed to my father for his birthday. Tante Paula and her husband survived the war years in Shanghai. They were there for nine years until the Communist takeover in 1949, when everyone was shipped to Israel. Their journey took them to the West Coast, San Francisco and from there to New York. They spent four days on Ellis Island, where we were able to visit them several times for short periods. This was the only time my father saw his sister again. From Ellis Island they were taken to Israel. I did not see Tante Paula until she came to visit us in Boston in 1967. They remained in Israel for about a year, before returning to Berlin. Their stay in Israel had been very difficult, living in a Ma'abara³ in the Mifrats⁴, near Haifa.

My mother, Alice Esther Gerechter, nee' Schickler was born in Hamburg, on December 11, 1903. Her father, Samuel Schickler, born April 29, 1876 in Hamburg and her mother, Louise Schickler (Omama), nee' Lewin, was born on November 15, 1877, in Posen. They had three daughters, Alice, Hertha and Lotte.

Grandfather Schickler came from a very large and old Hamburg family. They were merchants, supplying the large ocean liners of the merchant marine and other shipping companies with waterproof canvas covering and waterproof duffel bags for sailors. The business was located at 38 Merkurstrasse.

My grandfather had four sisters and four brothers: Cäesar (the father of Erwin and Artur Schickler and their sister Vera Daniel), John, Herman and Adolph. The sisters were Dora Salomon, Therese Meyer, Ella Mayer and Fanny Lissauer.

Most of my grandfather Schickler's family was deported. The following was gathered from the "Gedenkbuch" published by the Senate of Hamburg:

- Dora Salomon, nee Schickler (born January 2, 1864) was deported on July 15, 1942, to Theresienstadt and on September 23, 1942 to Minsk. Her husband, Leopold Salomon may have died before. Her daughter, Paula Katz, is not mentioned in the "Gedenkbuch" and therefore I have no knowledge what became of her.
- Therese, nee Schickler (born August 19, 1869) and her husband Siegmund Meyer were deported on July 19, 1942, to Theresienstadt and on September 21, 1942 to Minsk. Their only son was killed in World War I.
- Ella, nee Schickler (born January 21, 1879) and her husband Isaak Eduard Mayer were deported on July 15, 1942, to Theresienstadt and on September 21 1942 to Minsk. Their only daughter, Gerda Bacharach, lived with her family in Philadelphia.

³Tent city

⁴Bay

She had 3 children.

- John Schickler was deported on July 19, 1942 to Theresienstadt. His two daughters, Edith (born March 11, 1911) and Fanny, (born August 20, 1913) were deported on December 2, 1943 to Auschwitz.

Vera Daniel, daughter of Cäesar and Fanny Schickler, who lived in San Francisco, had her mother, live with her until her death in the early 60's. Vera died in January 1998. Artur Schickler, the brother of Vera and his wife Setty lived in Amsterdam since the early 1930's and were deported from there to Auschwitz on September 14, 1943. Erwin and his wife Hanna came to New York in 1938. They had no children and Hanna died in 1962, whereas Erwin died in the late 1960's. My grandfather, his brother Cäesar and Herman as well as his sister Fanny Lissauer and his parents, Rike (Zacharias) and Abraham Schickler are all buried in the orthodox cemetery, Langenfelde in Hamburg.

Since our visit to Hamburg in April 1996, at which time we spent a few hours at the archives, the following details of the Schickler family history in Hamburg, became known to me and should be included here:

Abraham Schickler was born in Rodenberg, near Frankfurt, on November 17, 1837. He moved first to Altona in 1853 and became a citizen of Hamburg on October 23, 1863, at the age of 26. He was a businessman, dealing in silk ribbons.

Abraham was 25 years old when he married Frederike (Rike) Zacharias. Rike was 23 years old when they married. She was born in Hamburg in 1840. They were married by Oberrabbiner (Chief Rabbi), Stern on November 8, 1863.

Abraham's parents were Heinemann Schickler and Doris Samuel. The parents of Rike were Benjamin Zacharias and Elisse Samuel. The mothers of Abraham and Rike were sisters. Therefore Rike and Abraham (husband and wife) were first cousins. Elisse and Rike had a brother named Wolff Benjamin Zacharias. He had been a citizen of Hamburg since April 16, 1858.

Rike's father, Benjamin, was born in Frankfurt in 1796 and died in Hamburg on December 28, 1872. Her mother, Elisse was also born in Frankfurt in 1796 and died in Hamburg November 17, 1872.

The parents of Benjamin Zacharias were Hertz Zacharias and Treindel Levy. (see appendix I, which are copies of original documents from the archive in Hamburg).

Omama, as mentioned, was born in Posen; her parents owned a hotel, "Kaillers Hotel." She met my grandfather while he was on business in Posen, and they were married in January 1903. Omama had three sisters and two brothers: Clara Bleiweiss, Bella Levi and Hedwig Gutheil. Her brothers were Siegfried Lewin and Leo Lewin.

Tante Clara had a son, Fritz, who was married to Erna and they had a son Oskar. She also had a daughter, Sidonie, who was not married. Tante Clara and Sidonie were deported to Riga on December 6, 1941, and Fritz Bleiweiss, his wife Erna (Rosenberg) and son were deported to Minsk on November 8, 1941. Oskar was only three years older than I was.

Additional information on the family Bleiweiss is as follows:

Clara Bleiweiss was born in Posen, May 18, 1875. Her son Fritz Bleiweiss was born in Posen, July 9, 1898. Clara's daughter, Sidonie, was born in Posen, February 14, 1901.

Erna Bleiweiss, née Rosenberg, was born in Apenrade, Denmark, on November 14, 1901; she was the wife of Fritz Bleiweiss. Their son, Oskar was born in Hamburg, November 16,

1927. He was only 14 years old when he was deported to the Ghetto in Minsk.

Bella Levi and her husband, Max, left for Argentina to join their son, Rudi, while their second son, Kurt, survived the war in the French underground. He has lived in Paris since the early thirties --he was a professional pianist. The youngest of the sisters was Hedwig, or Tante Hede, as we called her. She never had any children. She and her husband, Leo Gutheil, lived in Berlin. They escaped to Belgium, where they, too, survived the war in the underground. Brothers of Omama were married, each had one child and both men died of natural causes still in Germany. The older one, Siegfried Lewin, lived in Hamburg with his wife Valeska nee' Simon. She was deported to Riga on December 6, 1941. Their son, Gert, had left for Argentina in the early 30's and somehow disappeared completely. I spent much time with the Lewins in their beautiful villa, not far from where we lived. The second brother, Leo, lived in Berlin with his wife Hanna and their daughter Ilse. Hanna and Ilse were also deported and never heard from again. Ilse Lewin had gone through a pro forma wedding with a young man in Argentina, hoping that this would enable her to obtain an entry visa to Argentina, but it was to no avail. However, after the war, when Germany paid reparations, her pro forma husband claimed the house the Lewins had owned in Berlin.

I had been to the Lewins' home during a visit with my parents in Berlin, around 1934 or 1935, while visiting my grandparents Gerechter. The only other visit to Berlin was to my grandfather for his 70th birthday in March 1936. Unfortunately, my knowledge of the extended family especially on the Gerechter side is very limited.

First Five Years (1930-1935)

I was born on December 2, 1930, into a typical German-Jewish merchant family. My father had been trained before World War I to take over his father's business, but as already mentioned they had to leave Posen after World War I. He settled in Berlin, and became a businessman. When my parents married on August 1, 1926, my father moved to Hamburg, but continued to work primarily in Berlin.

I was the first grandchild on both sides of the family, but since the Schickler grandparents lived in Hamburg, I spent most of my time with them and was particularly close to my grandfather. Some of my earliest and most cherished memories involve my grandparents. Grandfather Schickler was suffering from diabetes and a heart condition and, therefore, had retired at an early age. He had many spare hours to spend with me, playing and taking many walks together, especially in the Bornpark. We had a wonderful time together! Opa Schickler was a very religious man. He went regularly to Shiurim⁵ and attended the Bornplatz Synagogue, which was the orthodox congregation in Hamburg. During my grandfather's lifetime, the Rabbi of the Bornplatz Synagogue was Rabbi Spitzer. Rabbi Joseph Carlbach became Rabbi of Hamburg in 1936.

Among my treasured memories of that era is the time when as a little girl I was allowed to go downstairs to the men's section on Simchat Torah⁶ night. Uncle Eric sat right behind my grandfather and so I could go from one to the other. When my basket was full with chocolates and sweets, my mother would take me across the street to the Damtor Synagogue, where my father was a member. The Damtor Synagogue had separate seating, but was not considered as orthodox as the big Bornplatz Shul. Since the two synagogues were just across the street from each other, my mother would alternate attending one or the other.

Rabbi Carlbach had been invited on several occasions to immigrate to England; however, he refused to leave his congregation and was deported together with them and his own family--wife and three daughters and one son--to Riga on December 6, 1941.

I adored my aunts, Hertha, Lotte and Uncle Eric and spent almost as much time with them as with my grandparents. I saw Hertha, who lived with my grandparents, whenever I was with them.

The first great tragedy of my life occurred when on December 28, 1935, just after my fifth birthday, my dear grandfather passed away. He was only 59 years old. Even though he had been ill, he had lit the candles on the first few nights of Chanukah from his bedside. His condition had deteriorated so much that I was no longer allowed into his room, and on the eighth day of Chanukah he passed away. I was not told of his death, but rather taken to the home of friends of Tante Hertha, Bertel Schauder, who lived in Altona for the day of the funeral and for the duration of the Shiva⁷. I was not told of his death until the day I was brought home. What I remember of that week is only that I was very unhappy to be away from home and did not like to stay with the Schauders. Altona seemed terribly gloomy to me.

⁵Talmud lessons

⁶Festival of Rejoicing of the law

⁷Seven-day period of mourning

My relationship with my grandparents had been a most unusual one. Omama very much mourned her husband's untimely death, and it seemed that I was her only consolation.

Steve's Arrival

The next great event was the arrival of Steve. Of course, I was not supposed to know that Tante Lotte was expecting a baby; "babies were brought by the stork". It goes without saying that I was not allowed to be present when he was diapered or nursed! He was born on April 24, 1936. Grandfather did not live to see his second grandchild; Stephen Samuel was named after him. Steve was born on a Friday evening, in the Jüdische Krankenhaus in Hamburg. I can still see Uncle Eric running up the stairs giving us all the great news. The Brith⁸ was on Shabbat at the hospital, and the Seudah⁹ was held at the home of the Baers in the presence of two of Hamburg's great rabbis--Rabbi Joseph Carlbach and Rabbi Lichtig. I was at the Seudah alone, since my parents and Hertha were at the Brith in the hospital. Omama hosted the Seudah.

If I had loved spending time with Baers until then, thereafter it became the greatest joy of my life. Finally, I had someone my size to play with and to care for. However, the year was 1936 and Hitler had come to power three years earlier--the first signs of anti-Semitism were already in evidence and, since Uncle Eric already had family in the United States, they, too, decided to make the move. My happiness about Steve's arrival was short-lived and when he was only eleven months old, in March 1937, they left for the States. I was inconsolable I did not see him again until 1946, when we arrived in New York and he was already over 10 years old.

⁸Circumcision

⁹Festive meal

First Grade

The big day had finally arrived--my first school day! As was the custom in Germany, every schoolchild, on the first day of school, received a huge, cone-shaped and very colorful container, filled with sweets of all sorts. I received two, one from my parents and one from my grandmother!

The school building was the same my mother, my aunts and my grandfather's sisters had attended the Loewenberg School for girls. Actually, it no longer was the Loewenberg School; it was now a school run by the Jewish Community of Hamburg, only the building was the same. The stories and memories related by my mother, Hertha and Lotte about their school years abound with happiness. The only girl I knew at school was the daughter of my mother's best friend, Lisi Schwab. Her daughter Herma was three years older than I was, but we were nevertheless good friends. She had a brother, Gerd Schwab, only one year older than I was. Both were deported to Riga on December 6, 1941. Their mother had passed away in 1938. Their father, Kurt Schwab, who had been in prison for many years because of smuggling family money across the Swiss border, had been released shortly before our departure from Hamburg. He was in turn deported to Minsk on November 8, 1941.

My new friends were the two daughters of my parents' friends, Dr. Leo and Edith Meyer. Eva was in my class and Hannelore one class higher. They also had a younger brother, Alex.

School in Germany began in April. This, then, was April 1937. We learned both German and Hebrew right from the beginning. Even at that time there were many children talking about leaving Hamburg for one country or another, but this was far from resembling a rush emigration.

Strong Signs of Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitic manifestations were in evidence all around, but for the most part people--and that included my parents--preferred to ignore them. People were sure that the regime could not possibly last very long. My father, in particular, felt very secure. Especially in view of the fact that he had fought for four years for Germany, had received a decoration from Hitler in 1935, which was given to front-line fighters only, and the fact that his brother had given his life for Germany. In the early days of Hitler's reign, my father had been very outspoken on several occasions, openly attacking those who publicly spoke against Jews or made outright anti-Semitic remarks. This false sense of security was the reason for his reluctance to make any attempt to leave Germany. In fact, it was not until sometime in 1938 that he registered with the American Consulate for immigration to the United States. His business was, in fact, doing very well at this point, the main business was manufacturing and selling leatherwork gloves, which he had designed and patented himself. These gloves were in great demand by heavy industry and laborers. This was the time of the great industrial revival in Germany after the difficult years following World War I and the depression. Hitler was preparing for War!

As early as 1936, Jews could no longer vacation anywhere they pleased, use public beaches or go to the theater benches in public parks bore signs prohibiting Jews to sit on them. Non-Jews could no longer work for Jews, etc. As a matter of fact, the nurse my mother had working for us when I was a baby kept coming to us illegally. My Deda, as I affectionately called her, had a stepmother who was a strong supporter of Hitler, and so were her children. Deda feared them and, therefore, did not reveal that she continued to come to our home. I remember that before that time, she used to take me to her home during the Christmas season to see the tree and the electric train her stepbrothers had built around it.

In the summer of 1936, Tante Paula and Uncle Leo Arndt wanted to go on vacation with us, but the question was where could one go. It was decided to try a small resort town called Buxtehude. However, already on the first evening, as we walked through the lobby, anti-Semitic remarks were made and the next morning the owner asked us to leave.

On another occasion I remember my parents taking me to a theater performance of Cinderella during the winter of 1937/38. We were not noticed even though I loudly remarked to my mother that the seats were the same as in our Shul¹⁰.

Tension grew all around us. More and more friends and family members left Hamburg and the newspapers were filled with propaganda and anti-Jewish slogans. Yet, there were many that were fully convinced that it would all soon come to an end. Unfortunately, not enough people believed that they would ever really be physically expelled from Germany.

I was in second grade. It was October 28, 1938, when the principal of the school came into our classroom one day and called out a number of children. Later, we were told that they would not be coming back to class. This was the expulsion of Eastern European Jews from Germany. These people had to leave all their belongings, homes, businesses, etc., and leave Germany within 24 hours. They were sent back to Poland and most of them were never heard from again. In some cases, the Germans would permit one member of the family to come back

¹⁰Synagogue

for a limited time in order to liquidate their affairs. Among them were Tante Hertha's friends, the Schauders, where I had been during the week of the Shiva after my grandfather had passed away.

Kristallnacht – November 9, 1938

As already mentioned, on October 28, 1938, all Jews living in Germany but being of Polish origin were deported to the German-Polish border. Among those deported were the parents of one Herschel Grynszpan. He had moved to Paris in early 1938, but when he learned that Polish Jews, including his parents, were being deported from Germany, he decided to assault the German ambassador in Paris in order to arouse public opinion in the West regarding Nazi persecution of Jews. Grynszpan shot an embassy official, Ernst von Rath, who as a result of his injuries, died two days later. His death served as the pretext for the November pogroms against Jews throughout Germany and Austria, which became known as "Kristallnacht." The German government attempted to present the attack as a spontaneous protest on the part of the population, while in fact it was unleashed very early on the morning of November 10th on orders of the Nazi leadership.

Almost every synagogue in Germany and Austria was either heavily demolished by gangs who began by throwing stones through the magnificent stained glass windows, by plundering everything inside, including the Sifrai Torah¹¹, or the entire building was set on fire and gutted by flames. Jewish-owned stores of all types were broken into and looted. The Jews owned many of the elegant department stores in major cities. The huge display windows were smashed and the merchandise dragged out to the sidewalk. Precious furs and elegant clothing were lying in the gutters, ink and perfume poured over them. The wild hoards had been let loose and they were making the most of it. Along with the destruction of property 30,000 Jews were arrested and sent to concentration camps such as Sachsenhausen, Buchenwald, Dachau and Oranienburg. There they were physically and mentally mistreated and in some cases killed. According to provisional Nazi estimates: 815 shops were destroyed, 171 homes were set on fire or otherwise destroyed, 191 synagogues burned and a further 76 demolished.

Eventually, most of those who had been arrested and had survived were released. One of the results of the Kristallnacht was an acceleration of emigration. The events of that November night and subsequent days marked a turning point in the treatment of German and Austrian Jewry. Thereafter, with the dissolution of cultural and communal bodies and the banning of the Jewish press, there was no place for Jews in the German economy and no independent Jewish life was possible.

These are the cold historic facts of the night of November 9th to the 10th and the week that followed. How did these events look when seen through the eyes of an eight-year-old? This was not yet the age of mass communication. The radio was not yet the instrument as we know it today--news did not travel that fast and so November 10th began just like any other day, and I left for school. I walked, as I had walked many a morning before. The route took me past our beautiful Bornplatz Synagogue, where masses of people had gathered in front of the portals and were shouting and throwing stones through the magnificent stained glass windows. I did not know what was going on, I just hurried on to get to school. Once in school we were told that something terrible had happened and that we would not remain in school. We were told that our parents had been notified to come to school and take us home. I was picked up by my mother

¹¹Torah Scrolls

and taken to my grandmother's home where we stayed all day. In the meantime, my father had gone downtown and had seen the terrible destruction of Jewish property that had taken place during the night; the broken windows, the ransacked stores, the destroyed merchandise scattered all over the streets and people being arrested at random. My father had been lucky, no one had recognized him in the city, and when they had come to our home to arrest him, he had no longer been there. Despite the fact that my mother tried to reason with him not to go back home that evening, but rather stay at grandmother's, he insisted that we sleep in our own home. We went home, did not turn on the lights, and went to sleep. I remember the terrible fear I felt, especially when indeed, in the middle of the night, the Gestapo came pounding on the door. We remained silent and eventually they left.

Early the next morning, with just a few necessities in a bag, we left for Omama's home and did not come back until the pogrom was over. It lasted an entire week. Omama had a very large apartment at 83 Grindelallee. The bedrooms were all in the back of the apartment and there my father, Bruno Becher, a dentist and friend of the Baers, and an elderly gentleman, Herr Buchholtz, were hiding in one of the bedrooms for a couple of days. Our assumption was that since grandfather had died in 1935, the Gestapo surely would not come looking for him. The assumption proved wrong, and on the second or third day of the pogrom two Gestapo men came to arrest my Opa. Omama told them with great dignity and calmness that her husband had passed away almost three years ago. They left, but my father and Bruno Becher did not want to take a chance that the Gestapo would come back for them. That night, under cover of darkness, they left for the sea resort of Blankenese. In Blankenese was a summer camp for Jewish children, which was also used as a Hachshara¹² for those preparing to leave for Palestine. Our friends, the Meyers and their three children, had escaped to Blankenese right from the beginning of the pogrom. Deep forests surrounded Blankenese and all those hiding there would take a supply of food along and spend the day in the forest. No one was caught in Blankenese and all came back after the week of terror was over.

Tante Hertha's fiancé, Ernst Rothstein, who was the business manager of a large department store called "Wagner," was arrested immediately on the morning of November 10th when he arrived at his office. He was sent to Oranienburg, from where he was not released until sometime in December 1938, shortly before Hertha left for the United States. He never made it to the States and was deported to Auschwitz on July 11, 1942. (See appendix II, the original in German and the English translation. This is a typical example of the indifference of those who lived in the safety of America). Baer's friend, Dr. Bruno Becher, was deported to Minsk on November 8, 1941; his wife Hertha and their two children, Werner and Ruth (Werner was born in 1932 and Ruth in 1937), were also deported to Minsk on November 18, 1941.

Coming back to the events of November 1938, my mother and I stayed with Omama the entire time, not really knowing anything about my father and also not knowing how long the pogrom would last and what was still to come. When we finally returned to our own home we were told by neighbors that the Gestapo had come several times looking for my father and had tried knocking down the door. Boot marks on the front door were indeed apparent. The winter had been cold and many of those who had been arrested and sent to concentration camps came

¹² Agricultural training school

back with severe frostbite and other injuries. As mentioned before, the events of the Kristallnacht, followed by the release early in 1939 of most of those arrested, resulted in accelerated emigration.

We went back to school after the pogrom was over. There were many girls in my class whose fathers had been arrested. I remember my friend Ruth Möller, whose father was a doctor, telling us that they would not listen to records or hear any music until their father would be back home. They, too, eventually left for the States.

I spent many a happy Shabbat in their home in New York in 1946, when I came to the States. They were a well-known family in Hamburg and later in New York, as well. Dr. Möller was for many years the president of the Breuer Congregation in Washington Heights.

Search for Temporary Asylum

Life never returned to normal again! The fear, the terrible fear, which affected my childhood, probably never left me. If anything, it was steadily reinforced by events throughout the war years. I had almost forgotten what that particular fear was like and how it manifested itself until I saw a film about a German Jewish family on Israel Television. When I heard the voice of Hitler, as it was broadcast over the radio from mass rallies, I suddenly recalled all the horror and fear with which I had grown up. I suddenly felt as though I was back in Hamburg, a five year-old, lying in my bed and not being able to fall asleep because from all of the neighbors' radios the thundering, fear-inducing voice of Hitler was echoing through the neighborhood.

A tremendous panic had taken hold of everyone. Even those who never believed that the situation would ever take on such proportion were now convinced. Everyone was frantically trying to find a haven somewhere in the world. There were very few places willing to accept Jews! Our family had been registered under the quota system to go to the United States. My mother and I, having both been born in Germany, had met the quota and could have left for the United States as early as December 1938, when we had received our first invitation to appear before the U.S. Consul-General in Hamburg. Since Posen, the birthplace of my father, had become Polish after World War I, he had to register under the Polish quota, which was very limited. My mother would not leave Germany without my father and therefore we did not bother to appear for our appointment.

We had further invitations to appear at the U.S. Embassy on February 28, 1939, as well as on April 28, 1939, by which time we were already in Albania. Each time it concerned only the two of us and not my father. Tante Hertha left for the United States in December 1938, so Omama was left alone with us. My parents and their friends, the Meyers, tried desperately to find a place to which they could temporarily immigrate. Somehow, the idea of trying to get a visa for Albania emerged. My mother and Dr. Meyer flew to Berlin and there at the Royal Albanian Consulate, on December 22, 1938, they received a visa for a period of between three and four months. We finally left Hamburg toward the latter part of February 1939. The official exit permit was dated February 23, 1939. On January 30, 1939 my father had to comply with a law dated August 17, 1938. According to that law he had to sign a document in the name of the entire family to the effect that he "agreed" to add the names of Israel and Sara, respectively, to our first names. Thereafter my name was Johanna Jutta Sara Gerechter.

Departure from Hamburg

I have a very clear recollection of the hectic few weeks before our departure from Hamburg. The packing itself was a major effort, especially since we could take only a few suitcases with us to Albania. The rest of our belongings were packed into a lift that was to be shipped to the U.S. once we arrived in New York. The decision on what to take and what to ship was no small task. Probably, the most difficult part was the emotional upheaval of leaving home, family and roots. As it turned out, whatever we took with us was totally unsuitable to the climate and condition we found in Albania, especially since my parents had thought in terms of staying in Albania for only a few months and not six and one half years.

In those days one had to get permission from the authorities as to what was allowed to be taken out of Germany. It goes without saying that no jewelry, no silver, such as cutlery and no ceremonial objects, were allowed to be taken out. I remember the day my parents went to the customs office to deliver all those items that they were not allowed to take with them. My mother was recognized by one of the clerks who had worked for my grandfather as a bookkeeper many years before. He made an exception and allowed them to take just a very few pieces of jewelry with them. Those items were packed into a small package, which was sealed with sealing wax. A list of the contents was enclosed and a copy of it had been forwarded to the border guard, so that when we crossed from Germany into Italy at the Brenner-Pass, the package was opened and the contents checked.

Many of our belongings remained behind and my father, in particular, had to discard a huge amount of old correspondence, pictures and other mementos. These included letters from his mother and father sent to him while in the army during WWI, letters from his fallen brother and many other items to which he was very attached. It was all very heartbreaking and difficult. We lived in an apartment house, which had central heating, and my father had arranged with the superintendent to burn his discarded papers in the big oven. I used to go down to the basement with him when he burned all those items so dear to him. It was as though he was burning part of his life itself.

The lift was packed and customs officials stood by watching everything that was being packed. I had to part with my toys, books and school things, all of which meant a great deal to me. For many years, I longed for these items, always hoping that some day I would get them back when the lift would finally arrive in New York. This was not to be. Our stay in Albania extended itself to six and a half years, not just a few months, and the lift was either destroyed during one of the numerous bombardments which Hamburg sustained or else the contents was distributed to German families who had been bombed out.

Before obtaining permission to leave Germany, we had to appear before the head customs official and produce passports, paid tickets, notice of departure, which was for a permanent exit from Germany, "Dauerabmeldung", and a declaration of the financial status at the time of emigration. All we were permitted to take with us was 10 Marks (RM) per person, the few suitcases that had been packed under the constant supervision of the customs official and whatever was permitted to be packed into the lift. At this point these things were no longer important, the only thing that mattered was to leave Germany as quickly as possible.

The last weeks had been very busy, hectic and sad. The worst thing was to leave Omama behind. We did not think that she could survive the primitive conditions in Albania and,

therefore, did not even try to take her along. Her quota number was not too high and so there was hope that she would be called up to the U.S. Consulate shortly and get to the States. She gave up her large apartment and moved in with her older sister, Clara Bleiweis. Omama's last residence in Hamburg was at Dillstrasse #8 with Clara Bleiweis.

The last night before our departure had at last arrived and my parents packed all night. The next morning we still went to Omama's home for breakfast before leaving for the railroad station. It was a very sad farewell, none of us knew when or if we would ever see each other again. It was indeed to be a very long separation--we did not see each other again until September 1946. Basically, only seven and a half years, but years which changed world order itself--years during which, because of the madness of one man, the larger part of our people were exterminated, families broken apart, disbursed to all parts of the world, never to see each other again. Those were years during which old established Jewish Communities throughout Europe were wiped off the face of the earth as though they had never existed.

Journey to Albania

On February 23, 1939, we left from the Dammtorbahnhof (name of railroad station) for Munich. The Meyer family, Dr. Leo Meyer, his wife Edith and their three children, Hannelore, Eva and Alex left with us. The few possessions I could take with me were extremely important to me; a doll, a ball and a few other things, all contained in a new shoulder bag, a gift from my grandmother. We four children were soon absorbed in play and our own make-believe world--the real meaning of the departure from our home did not strike us, as it must have struck our parents. To us it was fun to go on a long trip to an unknown country. To the four parents it must have been a heartbreaking experience! Not only did they leave their homes, families, roots and economic existence forever, but they did not know how to pay for the next meal or how to continue our trip after the ten Marks which each of us was allowed to take out of Germany, were spent.

We traveled all day and by evening arrived in Munich, where we spent the night. The next morning we continued by train to Italy, crossing the border at the Brenner Pass. As mentioned earlier, my parents had received permission to take a very few pieces of jewelry with them, which had been sealed, into a small parcel. When we arrived at the border crossing, border control officials took my mother and father off the train and both had to submit to a body search by the German border police. Apparently, they suspected that my parents had smuggled out other valuables, which were not contained in the parcel. When they found nothing, the parcel was opened and the contents very carefully checked against the list the border police had received in advance. The fear! What if the police decided not to let them back on the train? What if the train left before they had finished with their search? It was a 20-minute period of high tension! The Meyers were lucky. They had not been called out of the train. I had remained with them. My parents finally were allowed to rejoin us, and at last the train started to move again, at first very slowly, across the Brenner Pass and so to freedom!

After traveling all-night we arrived sometime the next day in Bologna, Italy. By this time, none of us had any money left and our parents did not know what would happen next. As the train pulled into the railroad station in Bologna we heard friendly, young voices inquiring whether there were any Jews from Germany on the train. We identified ourselves and several Italian students from the University of Bologna took full charge of us. They told us that they had an organized network of Jewish students whose job it was to help all refugees arriving in Italy from Germany. These students took us to a nice hotel and took full charge of everything until we were able to receive money sent to us from the United States, by the Baers and Hertha. Only then were we able to purchase tickets to Bari and from Bari to Durazzo, Albania. The Meyers also had relatives in New York, who sent them money. In the meantime, the Italian students took us sightseeing, paid for hotel and meals and took us to Shul on Shabbat.

This was the first time that any of us had been to a Sephardi Synagogue. For the first time, we saw the reading of the Torah from a standing Sefer¹³. The women came to services right off the street with their shopping baskets full with the purchases of the morning. It was all so strange! However, to this day I remember the emotional participation in the services on the part of the congregants, something I had never seen in Hamburg.

¹³Scroll of the law

During our sightseeing trips we saw, among other things, the two leaning towers, not as leaning as the one in Pisa, but nevertheless leaning towards each other. There were also many wishing wells around and I remember how we suddenly realized that one of the Meyer girls was missing. Eva had gotten too fascinated with the coins that were being dropped into one of the wells, and she had not realized that we had moved on. We found her shortly thereafter. It was also the first time that we discovered that not everybody in the whole world used the same kind of bathroom facilities we were used to. Here the toilets consisted just of holes in the ground! We children did not know what to make out of that. Little did we know that things were only going to get worse; this was a luxury by comparison to Albania.

After about a week and after having received money for the continuation of the trip, we went to Bari and embarked on a freighter for Durazzo. The only passage we could afford was third class, or better known as steerage. Everyone was seasick during the 12-odd hours of the Adriatic crossing.

First Impressions

At last we arrived in Durazzo on March 1, 1939, in the early hours of the morning, on a dreary, rainy, dark and depressing day. The ship docked in what was a very primitive one-dock harbor. The only thing in sight was a huge pile of charcoal, drenched by the torrential rain that was falling and a few Gypsies standing around and using jute sacks as their only protection from the rain. The sight was sad and deeply depressing--so much so that it is still vivid in my memory.

My poor mother's first reaction was: "I will not disembark. I will go straight back." To our great surprise and delight, here too were Jews looking for other Jews who might have escaped Germany and been on board. A previously arrived emigrant from Austria was there and he assisted us in getting off the ship and settled us temporarily in a so-called hotel. We were put up in the Hotel Splendid, which was fairly close to the port and on the main street in downtown Durazzo. There were already several other Jewish families living in the same hotel. Others had rented a large house, which had been made into a community hostel, or as they called it, "Emigranten Heim." The real name was Casa Shiaku. By this time, there were some 60 people, mainly from Austria, living either in Tirana or Durazzo. Since more were expected, they were trying to obtain a second large house to be set up in like manner. The women took turns with the cooking and helping in the kitchen and all ate together. It was organized somewhat like a Kibbutz system.

As mentioned, there were about 60 emigrants in Albania and for reason of expediency, we were all eventually concentrated in Durazzo into two hostels. To the best of my knowledge, everybody had come from Austria, with the exception of our friends the Meyers and us. This fact caused many problems as time went on, but more on that later.

In addition to the emigrants, there were Albanian Jews, whose origin was Greek. I am not sure as to the size of that community, but I was always told that this community consisted of two families, totaling about 30 members. They lived partly in Durazzo and partly in Valona. They were all engaged in the dry goods business.

When the first Austrian emigrants had arrived, they made contact with the Joint in the United States. By the time we arrived, the Joint was supporting the emigrants in Albania, paying for housing and food. They were sending dollars to the Greek family in Durazzo and they in turn gave us the equivalent in Albanian Leks. The two Greek families, whose names were Jakoel and Batino, were very wealthy.

In the meantime those of us who lived in the hotel had to go twice a day, rain or shine, to the hostel for meals. The food was awful, especially because we were not used to the very spicy Austrian cooking and we hated yogurt and sweet tomato soup!

Albanian winters consist of a rainy season and since there were almost no paved roads, we had to walk in mud from the hotel to the hostel, twice a day. All I remember is the constant brushing of our shoes and warm slacks.

Italy Occupies Albania - April 7, 1939

When we arrived in Albania, King Ahmed Zogu, later known as King Zog the I ruled the country. His wife, Geraldine, was of Hungarian origin. They lived in a beautiful castle on a hilltop overlooking the Adriatic Sea. On April 5, 1939, we woke up to cannon salvos announcing the birth of the Crown Prince of Albania, Leka. As a gesture of gratitude that a son and heir to the throne had been born, King Zog offered Albanian citizenship to all immigrants residing in Albania at the time. As history proved later on, it was fortunate that he never was able to carry out this offer, since only two days later, at dawn on April 7, 1939, Italian forces attacked Durazzo from the sea and landed, after only a short battle. The royal family fled to Athens, taking huge sums of money from the national coffer with them.

Pesach in 1939, our first in Albania, began on the evening of April 3rd and, of course, both Seder nights were celebrated in the hostel. There was tension. No one really knew what was going on. When we went for dinner on April 6th, we were told not to come back for supper, but rather to take some food back to the hotel with us for that evening and the next day. Indeed, in the early hours of the 7th we woke up to a barrage of shelling from the Sea. Our hotel was only about two blocks from the port, on Ruga Achille Starace. It must have been about five or six o'clock in the morning--the entire hotel was on its feet, running this way and that, but not really knowing where to go for shelter. We all finally settled for the stairs, which was the only place without an outside wall. Shells were hitting the lower part of the hotel and we could hear windows breaking in the upper rooms and bottles shattering in the bar--we just kept running up and down the stairs. Besides the Meyer family and ourselves, there was another couple by the name of Weinstein living in the hotel and Walter Mandel, a bachelor friend who had come to visit us.

The shooting and screaming naturally terrified us children. I think it must have been about 10 a.m. when we finally heard Italian soldiers enter the lower part of the hotel. They immediately took charge of us, and even while the fighting was still in progress, they took us out of the hotel and into the building of the Banco di Napoli. The bank was only a few houses away, but situated in a much stronger building. In front of the hotel stood a machine gun and next to it lay a dead Albanian soldier. My mother and I almost fell over both. In all this excitement my father remained very calm and thereby managed to keep all others reasonably calm and rational. I remember that at one point during the shelling the youngest child of the Meyers, Alex needed the potty, which had remained in their room. Despite everyone's protest that it was too dangerous to enter any of the rooms, my father went to get the pot while bullets were flying in all directions. My father was in his element--anything to do with war or the military was his forte.

Once we got to the Banco di Napoli, the soldiers began to offer us food and drinks from their own "K" rations. Everyone ate, except my parents. It was Pesach¹⁴ and not only was the food not kosher, but in fact everything was chametz¹⁵ on top of it. We were relatively safe in

¹⁴Passover

¹⁵Leaven Bread

that building for the rest of the day and long before nightfall the war was over. Albania was now one of Italy's conquests, such as parts of Africa had been. The reign of King Vittorio Emanuele III was extended to Albania and Mussolini reigned over Albania as well. As far as we were concerned the Italians treated us kindly and gave none of us any trouble at any time. This was the first of several wars that we experienced in Albania.

Shortly after the events of April 7th, we moved into Hotel Metropol, which was even more primitive than the Splendid had been. Both hotels were infested with bed bugs, mice and unbelievable amounts of mosquitoes! No matter what means my parents employed to relieve the situation, nothing helped. One evening we watched a mouse disappear into her hole and my father decided that he was going to block the hole with broken glass. He went out of the hotel and gathered what he thought were pieces of glass. When he came back, he realized, to his complete dismay, that what he thought was glass turned out to be dog droppings. Considering his unusual cleanliness and fear of bacteria, we all had a good laugh at his expense.

The Move to the "Emigranten Heim"

In the summer of 1939, the second "Emigranten Heim" was rented and we, like others who had lived in the hotel, could finally move together with the rest of the people. I already mentioned that the Meyers and we were the only emigrants from Germany, while the rest were from Austria. Tension was high, especially as time went on and people had nothing much to occupy themselves with. Antagonism developed, especially against the Meyer family, which resulted in several unpleasant incidents.

In all, we were six children and several of the parents organized lessons in various subjects for us. My father was the art teacher, and I certainly was not one of his star pupils. Since we all thought that our stay in Albania was only a temporary one, our parents did not consider it worthwhile sending us to Albanian schools. I later went to an Italian school.

Albania was a very primitive and unhygienic country, and all through that first summer most of our people suffered from various types of intestinal disorders, ranging from simple diarrhea to typhoid fever and, of course, malaria. Even though all drinking water was brought in from fresh water wells and all fruits and vegetables were boiled, many people became severely ill. Among the hardest hit was my mother.

It was in September 1939 that my mother became ill with typhoid fever. Unfortunately, it was not diagnosed for several weeks, at which point she was already so ill and so weak that she had to be taken to the hospital in Tirana, the hospital in Durazzo was totally inadequate to care for severely ill patients.

My mother had to be hospitalized for seven weeks. For most of that time she was on the critical list. Her fever was so high that she was mostly hallucinating. She did not want to eat anything and she was constantly losing weight. My father and I were in Durazzo and my father traveled almost daily between Durazzo and Tirana. I did not see my mother for all those weeks and the fear of losing her was very great! When she finally was better and could come home, her weight was down to 35 kilos and it took her a very long time to regain her strength. These were very difficult and sad weeks for me, and it was during this period that we all had to move out of the hostel and find accommodations elsewhere.

On the Move Again - This Time to the Beach

All along the beach of Durazzo were lovely little summer homes, which belonged to affluent Albanian families who lived in the capital. They lived in those homes only during the two summer months, July and August. The Meyers, one elderly gentleman, Herr Horn, and our family rented one of those summer homes and it was to this place that my mother finally returned from the hospital.

By now we had been in Albania for six months and from the very beginning continued all efforts to obtain an American visa. As soon as we had arrived in Albania my parents had registered with the American Consulate in Tirana, who had all our papers transferred from Hamburg, however, even before they arrived the Italians had occupied the country and the U.S. Consulate moved to Naples, Italy. This meant another transfer, further delays and more difficulties. Every Consul has his own demands. More documents had to be obtained from the States and more guarantees of support for us had to be sent to the Consul in Naples (see Appendix III).

The Meyers finally received their invitation to appear before the U.S. Consul in Naples in December 1939. Our own documents did not yet satisfy the Consul and had to wait some more.

My limited circle of friends diminished by three and my world broke down! The only other friend I had was Trude who was the child of a mixed marriage. Her mother was not Jewish but had followed her husband into emigration from Austria. We were good friends until one day she told me that she celebrated Christmas and would have a tree. I can't exactly describe what I felt, but I do remember not wanting her as a friend any longer. I was nine years old at the time. After the Meyers had left, we lived alone for a while in the summerhouse that was quite nice. It had three rooms, a central hall serving as a living room/dining room, a so-called kitchen and some sort of washroom/toilet. I don't remember what happened to Herr Horn. The house was built over a little brook and in order to get over the brook, one had to either walk over our porch or walk through the water. The winter of 1939-40 was relatively cold, especially on the beach, and the house was extremely humid. My mother used to warm and dry the beds with pre-heated bricks, which she would wrap in rags and place under the covers--it helped! Our only means of heating and cooking was by a so-called mangal, which is the Albanian word for a charcoal open pit. One had to ignite this fire outdoors and let it burn outside until the coals turned red. On one particular night it had been so cold that my parents decided to leave this charcoal heater in the room all night--it usually was put outdoors before we went to sleep. Sometime during the night I woke up and called for my mother, telling her that I felt sick. As she was about to get up, she too felt sick and so did my father. However, my father, realizing what had happened, opened the door to the outside and literally threw us out of the house. Once we hit the fresh air we became even sicker and unable to help ourselves. All night we were lying in the sand and it was only at daybreak that we finally recovered from the carbon monoxide poisoning we had suffered. We had had a very close call! Needless to say, we never slept with a mangal in the room again. We stayed in this house until summer came, at which time the owners wanted the place for themselves.

The Many Ways We Tried to Reach Safety Before the Catastrophe Hit

All that winter and spring my parents tried very hard to obtain the necessary documents and papers to satisfy the Consul in Naples, who finally, on May 8, 1940, invited us to come to the Consulate in Naples to receive our visas for entry into the United States. My parents immediately applied to the Italian authorities to grant us an entry visa to Italy for the purpose of going to Naples, which we were refused on the grounds that we were Jews. One of the other emigrants, who had obtained an entry visa just days before and was already on board, was taken off the ship just minutes before it sailed. The authorities had received orders from Rome not to allow Jews into Italy. Mussolini's good friend, Hitler, gave these orders.

My parents spent the entire summer of 1940, from May until September, trying every possibility and talking to officials, in order to obtain the permit to enter Italy. All efforts remained fruitless. The Italian officials, whose offices were all located in Tirana, the capital, were very sympathetic and very willing to help, but their orders came from Rome and they were personally powerless. My parents even tried to have our complete file transferred to the American Consulate in Athens, hoping to get out of Albania via Greece.

I remember the three of us going to Tirana to see the Greek Consul. We asked for his help in obtaining an entry visa to Greece. He turned out to be a big anti-Semite and did nothing for us. Next we tried Turkey and met with the same end result.

Time was running out--tension between Italy and Greece was growing steadily. In the meantime, we had moved twice already, always along the beautiful beach. It was always a question which owner of these summer homes wanted his home and for how long. For some time we lived right in back of a rather large house which was inhabited by several families. Among them the Krals, their sister, Olga, Herr Galitzky, who was the one who had met us at the port when we arrived, the Mandels, and a few others whose names I no longer remember. Life was quiet and fairly pleasant at that point. My father did a lot of pastel drawings, most of which I still have.

The Hias in America supported us until September or October 1940. They had also supplied us with a substantial quantity of Matzos, all in the care of the Jakoel family. For Pesach 1940 we had plenty of Matzos, but of course no other Pesach products. We managed as best we could, living mostly on fresh fruits and vegetables. As difficult as it was to keep Kosher, and for the most part we could not, however during Pesach we were very strict about it!

In July 1940, we received a postcard in Durazzo from Omama, who had finally obtained the various visas she needed in order to make her trip via Russia, Siberia and China, to the United States. The card came from Moscow and she wrote among other things that she would be en route for five more weeks before arriving in the United States. By the time she arrived at the Baers and Hertha, we had already been deported to Berat.

The summer of 1940 passed, with my parents sparing no effort to obtain an entry visa to Italy or to any other country that would grant us one. All efforts failed and we grew extremely desperate. As mentioned before, tension was steadily growing over Greece, which the Italians wanted to occupy. As foreigners, we were considered undesirable aliens and as such could not remain in the port city of Durazzo.

By August 1940, we had already received orders to be moved (deported) to the center of the country, Berat. Before leaving, however, my poor father made one last effort to obtain this so highly desired entry visa to Italy. He decided to go to the highest Italian authority in the country, the Viceroy,

Jacomoni (representative of the King of Italy in Albania), at his summer residence on top of the hill in Durazzo. He had written a letter explaining our plight that he intended to hand to an aide of the Viceroy. However, he was lucky and when he arrived at the gate and was about to be questioned by the guard as to what he wanted, the Viceroy himself was in the garden, and upon hearing what the problem was, received my father in person. He promised to do everything in his power and that we would hear from him.

Deportation to Berat

Shortly before being deported to Berat we had to move once again. This time we shared a house with an Italian count, who was drafted into the Italian army at the same time as we were sent to Berat. Not long before Rosh Hashanah 1940, all the emigrants from Durazzo, including ourselves, were deported to Berat.

On October 28th, the Italians tried to invade Greece. However, they were driven back and the Greeks occupied much of southern Albania, up to Gjinokastra, which for many months became the front line. At night we could see the firing of guns from our home. In April 1941, the Germans overran both Yugoslavia and Greece. The Italian army was very weak, and even their allies, the Germans, did not take them seriously.

I recall one particular incident when under the cover of a particularly dark and rainy night the Greeks penetrated deep into Italian lines by hanging cowbells around their necks pretending to be a herd of livestock. What a surprise and embarrassment when, at daybreak, the Italian army discovered that they had been surrounded by the enemy without a shot being fired.

After the German occupation of Yugoslavia, Jews from Belgrade and other parts of the country crossed the border into Albania and were held in the Pristina prison. They were treated well by both the local population and the Italian as well as Albanian authorities (see Appendix IV – Translation from Italian).

This historic fact is well documented in the excerpt from a book by Francesco Jacomoni – “the Politics of Italy in Albania”. Some of these Jews came to Kavaja, not far from Durazzo. We did not know anything about these events until Rosh Hashanah of 1942, when my parents decided to spend yontef¹⁶ in Kavaja and join the Yugoslavian Jews for a Minyan¹⁷. We spent both Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur with them.

When we arrived in Berat, a mountainous village we were assigned housing by the local authorities or as it was called there, the prefecture. Housing, in general, was extremely primitive; electricity inside the houses did not exist. Inside plumbing was of the crudest nature, and running water had never been heard of! We were assigned, together with families Wolf and Taub, to an old and abandoned Harem. The house was huge, surrounded by a large garden and very high walls. One had to climb many stairs to reach the living quarters of the Harem, which consisted of two very large rooms on either side of an extremely long corridor. Somewhere, there was another small room and a so-called kitchen. There certainly was no bathroom and only a most primitive toilet. We never used the kitchen, since the rats walked quite freely around. The windowpanes of most of the windows were broken and when winter set in we hung our winter clothes in front of the broken windows to protect us from the cold wind and rain.

As I stated earlier, we arrived in Berat shortly before the High Holidays of 1940, and since family Wolf and we were the only two families who were observant, we improvised services in the Wolfs' room. I believe that for Yom Kippur some of the other emigrants also came to join us for prayers. The financial situation was very difficult and became more and more critical. The Albanian Government

¹⁶Holidays

¹⁷Quorum of 10 men

supported us by paying us a few Leks per day, which was not enough to live on.

As is usually the case, despite the misery, there are always humorous incidents--and so it was here as well. It was during the first evening in Berat, after we had been assigned to the Harem and after both families Wolf and Taub had argued over the same room. Herr Taub had decided to put up his bed in the long corridor, just in front of the Wolfs' room. We had been travelling all day long and were tired and thirsty. Not knowing what the water situation in Berat would be, we all took wine bottles filled with drinking water along. It seems that the Wolfs had finished all their water and Mrs. Wolf was very thirsty, so she asked Herr Taub whether perhaps he had some water left to which he replied, "bin ich ein Brun?"--Am I a well? We repeated this strange reply for years to come. It had just been such a funny situation.

During this period my father decided to make money from his life-long hobby of painting. He painted colorful signs for storeowners in which he depicted their wares. It helped us to survive and later we were able to receive, from time to time, some money from the family in the States.

Shortly after we arrived in Berat and lived in that awful house, I found a stray dog with three puppies in the garden. A few days later one of the neighborhood boys came and tried to chase the dog and her very young puppies away. I took one of the puppies for myself. This was Piccolo! My first dog, a female, not withstanding her masculine name. She was only two weeks old when we took her. My poor father had to get up several times every night and feed her milk from a bottle, but we managed to raise her and she was our faithful and lovable friend and companion for three and a half years, eventually she died of rabies. She gave birth twice, once to one puppy and the second time to five puppies. This was very exciting and represents my fondest memories of my childhood in Albania.

Shortly after our arrival in Berat in September, both my mother and I became ill with the dreaded disease, malaria. We had one attack after another, and my mother was finally treated with very strong drugs, which contained large doses of quinine, which left her very weak. It cured her and she never had another attack. I had recurring seizures until, in 1945, shortly before leaving Albania, I was treated with a medication called Mixtura Pagelli. All I remember is that it was a horrible, bitter liquid medicine and every time I had to take it, I would hide under the beds and my mother had to come and get me. She would hold a spoonful of this awful liquid in one hand and a spoonful of sugar in the other one. However, as terrible as it was, it cured me and I never had another attack. My father remained spared from malaria.

Winter weather made life even more unbearable. However, the worst thing was that as the war between Greece and Italy progressed, Berat became the object of severe daily bombardments by the British.

The first of such bombardments occurred one nice sunny winter morning while I was sick in bed and my mother had gone into the city to stand in queue at a bakery. My father was home with me and just happened to look out in time to see this perfect formation of six or eight planes in the sky, flying over Berat. The Royal British Air Force was helping the Greeks fight against the Italians. Before he realized what was happening, bombs were falling on all sides. Of course, there were no shelters. The only place one could find cover was the nearby mosque, which, on its grounds, had a windowless structure, built from very thick stones, which was used to wash the dead before burial. What we had not known until that day was that right across from where we lived, on top of the mountain, an anti-aircraft installation had been set up and it was that installation which the British tried to destroy.

Berat is a town in southern Albania, with a population of 14,350. The majority of the inhabitants are Muslim and the town is divided into Muslim and Christian quarters. The Christians were permitted

to live only on a hilltop while the Muslims lived in the rest of the town. The town is located near the river Osum, which often overflows its banks, leaving stagnant pools, which breed malaria-carrying mosquitoes. The winter months are rather cold and even though there is no snow, it does get icy.

Early one morning, it must have been in October or November, my father was just shaving when two Carabinieri-Italian police--arrived at the Harem and asked for my father. Under the circumstances and considering the times we lived in, the appearance of two policemen was a very upsetting occurrence. My father came as he was, half shaven and half dressed. The two officials produced a large scroll, unrolled it and ceremoniously read from it: "His Majesty, the Viceroy greatly regrets to inform Signor Gerechter that despite his efforts with the authorities in Italy, he had been unable to obtain an entry visa for you." Not that my parents had placed much hope in the Viceroy, but with that message the last hope of leaving Albania and Europe before the end of the war was completely shattered.

My 10th birthday took place while we were still living in the Harem. I remember my parents sitting up in bed late at night, keeping warm under the covers and, together, sewing clothes for my doll. They used outgrown dresses of mine and so produced an entire new wardrobe for my doll, which I cherished for all the remaining years of my childhood. As it often happens, Chanukah¹⁸ of that year coincided with my birthday. Our Chanukah candles consisted of cotton wicks, suspended by razorblades, which in turn were supported by corks on all four sides. There were no small candles to fit into the Chanukiya¹⁹, which we had with us. Benjy is now using this Chanukiya, which had belonged to my father. It was one of the few items which we were permitted to take with us from Germany.

We moved from the Harem in January or February 1941, to a room in the home of an Albanian family. The women had fled to the country because of the constant bombardments which, indeed, grew in intensity and frequency. That year Ramadan took place in early spring. It is the month-long period of fasting by the Muslims, which is concluded by the feast of Bairam and which lasts two or three days. During this time the wealthy Muslims slaughter several sheep, cut them up and together with other food, both raw and cooked, as well as baked goods, leave it in holes dug in the ground for the poor to take. I guess we were considered poor and food and gifts were sent to us from all of the neighbors. This is probably the first time that we ate pilaf and baklava, which we received in large quantities. Our Muslim neighbors also invited us to come to the Mosque with them, which we did. The people were very friendly to us. Albanians in general are very hospitable.

The British continued their bombardments day and night, since it was assumed that the Italians had ammunition dumps in Berat, especially inside of Mosques and hospitals. For days on end we would go to sleep with our clothes on, and several times every night we had to run for shelter. Even if we got undressed to go to sleep, my father insisted that we leave our clothes at the foot of the bed in the order in which we would put them on, so as to save time. To this day, I have the habit of never going to sleep without leaving a housecoat at the foot of my bed, always having an instinctive feeling that I might have to leave the house in a hurry. One day, I remember it had been a relatively quiet day and my father had decided that it was high time to take a sponge bath (there was no bath or other facilities--one washed in a basin in the room). He had just gotten undressed when the siren went off and he had

¹⁸Festival of Lights

¹⁹Candelabrum for the Festival of Lights

to run in little more than a towel around him. I thought it was funny, of course!

In order to raise the morale of the people in the area, some high Italian officials had come to visit Berat and had given the town a pep talk. My mother, not being bashful, approached one of the officials and pointed out to him that it was extremely dangerous to live in Berat and that she wanted him to authorize a transfer to the next town, even smaller than Berat, called Lushnje (pop. 8,500). He told her to come to Tirana within a few days and that he would see what he could do to help. My mother and one or two others went as representatives for the entire group, and indeed the same official received them and gave his permission for all of us to be moved from Berat to Lushnje.

We Move Again - This Time to Lushnje

We arrived in Lushnje in March 1941, and lived in a hotel for a few weeks before finding accommodations in the home of an Albanian lieutenant from the local police. He was a Muslim, had several wives and many children, all of whom lived on the family farm, while he worked in the "big city." I remember him well, he was a nice man and life was quite good for us during the few months we lived there. Pesach of that year is very clear in my mind. Particularly since this police lieutenant sat through the entire Seder with us and had my father explain everything to him. Life there was quiet, no more bombardments, but also very boring. There was no place to go! One main road went through this entire town and that was it. While we were in Lushnje, my parents made the acquaintance of an Albanian Bey (an Aristocratic Title), whose name was Vrioni. He was a feudal landowner, who was the living example of what the old feudal system was all about.

Bey Vrioni sat all day in one of the few coffee houses playing cards for gold coins, while his tenant farmers were working the land, selling the produce and delivering the proceeds on market day to him. He took us once to see his estate, which was vast, but only sparingly cultivated. The rest was used as grazing grounds for the sheep and the few cows they had. The families of the tenant farmers lived in extreme misery, which is difficult to describe. Entire families with six or eight children occupied one room with no roof and only a clay floor. Individuals like this Bey feared for their lives. He would not go to his own farms, and later on he would only meet with trusted individuals who delivered to him the proceeds from the sale of the produce. He no longer dared to go to them, but he let them come to him. All of these farms were nationalized after the takeover by Enver Hoxha in November 1944. Many, if not all of these landlords, were arrested and some even executed.

Returning to Durazzo - Summer of 1941

As soon as the Italian authorities and the local government permitted us to leave Lushnje we returned to Durazzo, which was sometime during June or July 1941. The Italian authorities were totally unconcerned about the fact that we were Jews and gave us absolutely no trouble. We had many friends, both among the Albanians and Italians who could simply not understand what our concern was all about. They were not anti-Semites and did not even understand what that meant. Italian Jews were Italians for them, and that was it. In fact, there were a number of Italian Jews among the truck drivers who had come to Albania to make money by transporting goods and military equipment for both the civilian population and the military authorities. Most of these drivers were living in Durazzo since that was the main port, some with their families, but mostly without. For many it was a way out of serving in the army, since some of them had been fighting in Africa during the 30's and had no intention of fighting again. We had many very good friends among those people and kept contact with them even after the war.

By the summer of 1941, we still had no knowledge of what was going on in the rest of Europe with regard to deportations, concentration and forced labor camps. By the time Omama had left Germany, the only continuous contact was with grandmother Recha, my father's stepmother. She and many other Jews in Berlin were working in ammunition factories as forced laborers. They lived under difficult conditions, but nevertheless in their own modest homes and among their friends. It was not until later that year that we received a postcard from her, dated October 14, 1941, my father's birthday, in which she wrote that she did not know how much longer she would be in Berlin. I believe that was the last sign of life we received from her. We did, not know the whole horror and the extent of what was going on in Europe, until after the war had ended. This was probably very lucky for us, especially after the German occupation of Albania in 1943.

When we left Lushnje, some of our people went to live in Tirana while others returned to Durazzo, like we did. One of the families my parents were friendly with was Walter and Finny Mandel, and together we found a small farm house on the other side of the highway, which runs parallel to the sea, this area is called Shkoset. We lived in the downstairs room while the Mandel's lived upstairs. In the back of the house lived the farmer and his family. We felt that this was less conspicuous than to live in the city or along the beach. My parents and the Mandels started a laundry for Italian truck drivers. The men washed and the two women did the ironing. The irons were a far cry from today's electric steam irons--these were heavy iron things, which were heated with burning charcoal. Difficult to adjust, to say the least, and not very healthy, considering the smell of charcoal. My job was to pull the water from the well, which was on the premises. The farmhouse was about a 20-minute walk from the highway and electricity did not reach that far. We had only kerosene for light and charcoal fire for cooking and heating. Our faithful Piccolo was still with us and for me the life on a farm was quite exciting. The farmer had a cow and I learned to milk her. I had a chicken which eventually hatched five chicks and that was great excitement as well. The farmer's wife gave birth to a baby right there in the house, aided only by an old woman, supposedly a midwife. My mother was called in for "consultation" when the navel of the newborn baby did not heal--they wanted to know whether they were correct in putting coffee grounds on it? Besides this, they had placed a broom over the crib so that nothing would happen to the infant, not to speak of the red ribbon around its neck and the piece of cloth filled with dust under its head. I think that, despite all these "precautions," the infant

grew up.

By this time, we had lived in no less than ten different places since our arrival in March 1939. Needless to say, this fact alone was not very conducive toward a secure childhood. My needs were obviously quite different from my parents'. Washing other people's laundry for a living was a degrading experience for my parents. What we did not know at that point, of course, was that all our hardships and difficulties were minimal in view of what others suffered in the rest of Europe.

School Days

Since I had left school in Hamburg in the middle of the second grade, in February 1939, I had had no formal schooling. From the very beginning of our stay in Albania my parents had taught me arithmetic, reading and writing, as well as some geography and history. As soon as I was able to read properly, I read anything that came into my hands--newspapers, books, magazines, anything, but in German only. I had learned to speak Albanian from the children in the street, but could neither read nor write the language. During the months in Berat and Lushnje my parents had asked one of the people in our group, an elderly gentleman, Herr Altman, to be my teacher. I liked this gentleman very much and we had regular lessons for a while. I don't remember when, but Herr Altman passed away before we even returned to Durazzo.

As the summer of 1941 slowly turned into fall, I was registered in an Italian afternoon school which was for Albanian speaking children who intended to enter regular school the following year. The school was in the city of Durazzo, a bus ride of about 30 minutes, this in addition to the 20-minute walk from the farm house in Shkoset to the highway where I had to catch the bus. I was delighted and immediately loved the school, the teacher and my schoolmates.

My mother took me there and picked me up the three or four times a week those lessons were given. I had very little difficulty learning Italian and spoke like a native within a short time. Indeed, the following school year I was one of the pupils of the Convent School, which was being run and taught by Catholic nuns. I had to wear the customary black frock, white collar and a big royal blue bow. We were also expected to salute our teachers whenever we would meet them in the street. During Morning Prayer I, along with all the Muslim children, was permitted to remain seated, but nevertheless I memorized all the prayers. I simply loved the school and felt so good that finally I was like other children, a pupil at school. I remember every day that passed, and felt sad that it would be one less day of school before summer vacation. I learned quickly and soon became the favorite pupil of the nuns. It was considered a big privilege to walk the nuns back to the hospital where they lived. I was asked many times to be my teacher's escort. On several occasions we would stop in church and she would go in and pray. Several times she had asked me to kneel down with her and I consistently refused.

I remember her telling me that by just kneeling down nothing would happen. I remained steadfast and when I told my parents, they told me to try and avoid walking the nuns home. One time as we were walking together, my teacher said to me that it was very sad that Jews had to suffer so much. It would be much wiser if we all became Catholics and then the suffering would stop for us. I can't remember exactly what I answered her, but I did say something about being Jewish and believing only in G'd. They were understanding and always kind. They certainly never insisted that I do anything against my belief.

As winter approached and the heavy rains started, it became more and more difficult to get to school, but I don't think that I ever missed a day and I was very happy. On occasions when the teacher had to be out of the class she would ask me to take over and teach the children. I loved it! This happiness lasted until the Germans occupied Albania in the summer of 1943. Subsequently the school was closed down and all Italians were deported from Albania as though they were the enemy not partners of the Axis.

Life in General - 1941-42

As mentioned before, upon our return to Durazzo, my parents started the so-called laundry. With the onset of winter it became progressively more difficult to keep it up, but my parents nevertheless did. Their friends, the Mandels had decided to give up the laundry and moved to the city. They began to trade in all sorts of products--buying wholesale and selling to retail stores. My parents continued the laundry on their own, but it was very hard work for them. Several times a week we would go to the beach front, where all the truck drivers lived and collect the dirty laundry and deliver the clean one. It was very heavy and very difficult. We would usually go during lunch or dinnertime and find all our customers in the mess hall; thus, we did not have to go from house to house to deliver and collect the wash. I remember many times we would get there at one o'clock, which was the time of the daily newscast on the radio. Everyone would stand up and salute the Duce for his phenomenal achievements in Africa, until one day the tide had turned and the fortunes in North Africa had turned in favor of the Allies.

One of the more pleasant activities during this time was the popular nightly concert given on the terrace of the Belvedere hotels. One or the other of our Italian friends often invited us or else we went on our own. I loved to listen to the women singers and, of course, knew every popular song and every ballad of the day. It was during that first summer back in Durazzo that we met the Pilku family, who were to play a very important role in our lives.

Once again, it was September/October and time for the Chagim²⁰. There were no other emigrants who lived near us or who cared about a Minyan. The only other family who lived along the beach was the Kraus family, but they were of a mixed marriage: he Jewish and she and the daughter Christians. So, we just stayed home in our farmhouse and my parents prayed all day, both days of Rosh Hashanah²¹ and Yom Kippur.²² It was very sad to be alone during those days. We observed everything very strictly and had our own Jontef. I was 11, only one more year before I, too, would fast. Life had become very routine, while the world was in a major conflagration, European Jewry was systematically being wiped out and we were very isolated indeed, with no radio and only old, outdated occasional German newspapers. We were also completely cut off from the family in America, as no mail came through and we no longer heard anything from Grandmother Recha. Even messages via the International Red Cross hardly ever reached us, and if they did, they had been en route for four months or more.

²⁰Jewish Holidays

²¹Jewish New Year

²²Day of Attonement

Acquaintance with the Pilku Family

As already mentioned, we met Njazi and Liza Lotte Pilku during those early weeks after our return from Lushnje, and became very close friends with them. Mrs. Pilku came from Braunschweig, Germany and Mr. Pilku, who was a civil engineer, had studied in Germany where he had met his wife. They had two boys, Edip and Luan. Mrs. Pilku's father had been one of the early supporters of Hitler and secret meetings had taken place in the basement of their home. She was an ardent admirer of Hitler and had a large colored portrait of the "Führer" hanging in her living room. For some incomprehensible reason, she had taken a liking to us and came often to visit us in Shkoset, bringing food and other goodies to us. We were also frequently invited to their home.

There was a substantial German/Albanian group, consisting mostly of German women who had married Albanian men who had studied at various German universities. There were also some families where both husband and wife were Germans. Many of these people served as the Fifth Column for Germany. They were all very close friends, and often held typical German beer and slaughter parties (I still don't understand how that was possible in a predominantly Muslim country and where most of the husbands of these German women were Muslims). The Pilku family were also Muslim and the two boys were circumcised before their 13th birthday, which was a big event. Wealthy Albanian Muslims invite the children of poor families to be circumcised at the same time so that the poor families could participate in the festivities without any cost to them. We were not invited to that event!

Fall and winter of 1941-42 saw the world in ever-greater trouble. On December 7, 1941, Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and the next day declared war on America. Several days later the Axis declared war on the United States. Some Italian chauvinist, who was sure that now the Axis would beat the Allies and victory was assured for them, related all of this news to us. For us, it was a very sad and most depressing event. Now there really was no more hope whatsoever of getting out of Europe until the end of the war and that was very, very far away. My parents were near desperation--the Germans had occupied Yugoslavia and Greece while Hungary, Rumania and Bulgaria had joined the Axis. It was now only a matter of time before Germany would swallow up Albania as well. From time to time, we would see groups of German soldiers who had come to Durazzo to buy up all they could. Many times we saw them inside the dry goods store of the Jakoel family; after all, the fabrics they purchased and sent to their families did not "smell" from Jews!

Our life went on as best as possible--I was happy in school, my mother was not doing as much laundry as before because my father had started to paint signs for stores and huge ones for some Italian construction company which was engaged in road building.

February 13, 1942 - Friday Night

After the Mandels had moved out of the upstairs room of the farmhouse in Shkoset, a single Italian had moved in. I don't remember anything about him except that during the night of February 13th two Italian soldiers belonging to the Bersaglieri (they have a bunch of black feathers on their helmets), tried to break into our room and we called for help. The Italian living above us, realizing what was happening called down to us that in the morning he would come and help. It was a dark and cold night outside. We were already in bed and our dog Piccolo was fast asleep in his box under the table when, suddenly, the wooden shutters were opened from the outside, the screen was cut with a bayonet, and the window opened. One of the two soldiers already had his leg up on the window and wanted to jump in, while the other one asked for money. At that very moment our good dog woke up and took one jump through the window, which scared the two soldiers to such an extent, that they let go of the window and ran away. The dog barked for hours before ever coming back into the house. We were terribly shaken up by that event. My parents and I sat up most of that night praying and saying Tehilim²³. We were sure they would be back, even if not that night, but surely some time in the future. The next morning my father went to report this incident to the nearest police unit at the seashore. Indeed, they followed this matter up and came out to investigate and to ask questions. The nearest base of the Bersaglieri unit was several kilometers away from us, but the officer of the police unit insisted that we come out and try to identify the two from a line-up. There were many that looked as though they were the culprits, but it was impossible to make a definite identification and so my parents said nothing. They may indeed have been among those in the line-up and it may have scared them. At any rate, they never came back again.

Our landlord took several precautions thereafter. In the first place, he knocked a hole through the wall in our closet, which connected his apartment with ours, so that in case of a similar incident, we could escape to his side of the house. It never became necessary, thank G'd. He had a very large German Shepherd dog, which apparently had been lured away with food that night. Hereafter, he was tied up to a wire, which ran around the entire house, and there he stayed all night long. I never overcame my fear, despite all these precautions, and remember how I always looked over my shoulder whenever we walked home late at night. We really lived far off the beaten path and were very isolated.

²³Psalms

The Casaleggio Family

Not long after this incident, new tenants moved into the upstairs room. This time it was an Italian family from Milano with a little baby--Enrico and Anna Casaleggio and their little girl Elsa. In fact, Elsa was born on the same 13th of February 1942, the same day we were assaulted. We became very good friends and I was delighted with the baby, which the Signora allowed me to feed, bathe and play with. She taught me how to knit and to this day I knit the way she taught me. I loved Elsa and the summer of 1942 was very happy for me. In 1988, I visited the Casaleggios in Milano and met their son and grandchild.

During the summer of 1942, I became ill and broke out in a rash. My mother took me to Durazzo to a doctor who took one look at me and decided that it was a serious illness and that I had to be immediately hospitalized in Tirana and placed in an isolation ward. Since there were no phones, and since there was really no way to communicate with my father, who had remained home in Shkosit, we took a bus and went straight to Tirana and to the hospital. On preliminary examination it was decided that I had contracted Typhus fever--therefore, the red spots all over my body--and that I had to be isolated. My mother felt terrible, but she had no choice but to leave me there and return to Durazzo alone. I was very lonely and frightened to be left alone so far away from my parents. Thereafter, either one or both of my parents came every day from Durazzo to visit me, even though they could only look through the window and talk to me from the outside of the wooden shack that constituted the isolation ward. There were very sick people in that area of the hospital and it is a small wonder that I did not really get seriously ill. My rash disappeared after a few days, at which point the doctors had to admit that all I had suffered from was roseola.

When several months later I came down with the measles my mother kept me in bed at home, and did not even call a doctor. I was not going to an isolation ward again! After recovering from the measles, we went to Tirana for a checkup. On the way back, our bus was attacked by the British Air Force. We were on the open road and suddenly out of nowhere several planes swooped down and with machine guns attacked our bus and other vehicles on the road. We all went down on the floor and my mother threw herself on top of me. Except for being terrified, no one, miraculously, got hurt. Hereafter, we tried to avoid traveling at all costs.

The other important event of that year was the fact that my dog Piccolo was expecting her first litter of puppies. It was all very exciting; we waited with her and watched her getting heavier and heavier. We prepared a special basket for her with all sorts of soft things in it, and every night we put her into a small room, which was a storage room, located right next to ours. One night we woke up from her crying and scratching at the door. A few minutes later we heard the whimpering of the puppy. The litter turned out to be one beautiful white and black puppy just like herself. Mrs. Pilku wanted it and we gave it to her.

Fire at the Casaleggios

Since the Casaleggios needed more room than just the one bedroom and since there was a large open porch adjacent to their room, they built a wooden shack, which served as their kitchen. The only means for cooking available was either a charcoal pit, the Mangal, or else a primus cooker which was filled with kerosene. One evening the Casaleggios had invited a few people for dinner and my mother and I helped Anna to prepare the dinner, when she realized that one of the primuses needed to be refilled. She poured kerosene from a Chianti bottle and the entire bottle, straw and all, caught fire in her hand. Within seconds the entire shack was in flames, my mother's clothes had caught fire as well. Someone who was standing nearby grabbed a tablecloth and swung it around mother, thereby smothering the flames. Anna could not get the straw handle of the bottle from her hand and so got severely burned on her hand and arm. I ran for the baby and took her out of her crib, and everyone else tried to smother the flames with water, which was not very effective since every pail had to be pulled from the well. The flames were strong and intense and were seen by the police on the beach. They came after a while, thinking that some kind of act of terrorism had been committed. The entire wooden shack burned down, but the house remained intact. It was a terrifying experience and the Casaleggios never really got over the fire. Before the winter of 1942-43, they moved to an apartment on the beach.

The house in the country had no sanitary facilities other than a wooden outhouse. It was by far the most primitive of all the facilities we had experienced so far. It was just a shack on stilts and open in the back, which was particularly uncomfortable in winter weather. When it rained, it rained right in and all the neighborhood chickens came there to feed as well. If anyone of us suffered from diarrhea, it was very unpleasant and difficult, to say the least. My father and Signora Casaleggio had such an experience, which became the family joke for years, though at the time it was not funny!

High Holidays - 1942

By the summer of 1942, the Yugoslavian emigrants had been released from prison and were brought to Kavaje, which was not far from Durazzo and so we went there for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur in order to have a Minyan. This was the very first time that we were told by eyewitnesses about mass killings by the Germans. These few families had literally escaped by the skin of their teeth. The Germans had come into their homes by the front door and they had fled through the back one. They all had been in Belgrade during the 24-hour bombardment by the Germans and some of them had lost family, either during the bombardment or at the hands of the Germans. There was one family who had lost their son who, together with hundreds of others, had been taken to a forest outside Belgrade and been shot. The stories these people told were horrendous and constituted our first knowledge of what was really going on. After the holidays we went back to Durazzo very apprehensive of the ever increasing threat that the Germans were about to occupy Albania as well!

The War During the Summer of 1942

The late summer of 1942 was perhaps the darkest period of the war. In North Africa the Axis under Rommel advanced as far as Egypt. In Russia the Germans were launching their attack on Stalingrad, which in the end was a decisive factor in Germany's defeat on the Russian front. The battle over Stalingrad lasted from September 1942 until the surrender, in February 1943, by the Commanding General Friederich, von Paulus. German losses alone were estimated at 300,000 men. I remember hearing this on the once-a-day BBC News in German, which we received on a battery-operated radio and with tremendous interference from the Germans. Thereafter, the Russians kept up the offensive until the end of the war. The next decisive blow to the Axis came when General Montgomery attacked the forces of General Rommel at El Alamein in North Africa in October 1942, and defeated Rommel's army. All of Africa was not cleared of Axis forces until May 1943. Thereafter, the Allies conquered Sicily in July-August 1943, and invaded mainland Italy, which surrendered in September 1943. However, the German army in Italy fought a rear-guard action and Rome did not fall into Allied hands until June of 1944. In view of all of these Allied advances in Europe and in particular in Italy, we constantly hoped that there would follow an invasion of Albania by the Allies. Instead, the Germans occupied Albania in the summer of 1943, and with that the most difficult period of the war began for us.

Our Family Life

During all these years of constant danger, poverty to the point of actually not having enough food while in Berat, the constant humiliation for my father from a professional viewpoint, and the day-to-day hardships of life, my mother remained the pillar of strength. She was cheerful and gay, as everyone who knew her will remember. She was a tremendous support and help to my father in everything he did. She even tried to make my childhood years in these unbelievable conditions as pleasant and happy as possible. She always found all sorts of little ways in which she would make me happy. I don't know how she did it, but she always managed to make the places we lived in as clean and livable as possible.

The little we had we still shared with others, in particular with a man who came originally from Prussia and had fled to Budapest. After the German occupation he continued on foot to Salonika, Greece and finally across the border into Albania. For a long time, I remember that he would come every day and share our daily white bean soup with us. My father was often depressed and hopeless as the years went by and there was no sign of an end to the war and our untenable situation. Both my father and mother made tremendous efforts to observe tradition as much as possible and run a religious home. We never missed keeping Shabbat and I don't remember my mother ever failing to light Shabbat candles, even if by doing so she would expose our identity. We always kept Pesach in the strictest possible way, with no Matzoth and by living an entire week on nothing else but potatoes and eggs, plus some vegetables. Also, almost every year we managed to find other Jews with whom to spend Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. It was my good fortune that my parents were that strong, which helped me come through those years as well as I believed I did. I can remember several occasions when my parents had to find plausible excuses for declining invitations that coincided with either Yom Kippur or Pesach. The reason we did not have Matzoth was due to the lack of responsibility on the part of the local Jewish families, the Jakoels and Batinos. Even though they had their own oven to bake Matzoth, they were not willing to sell us any, let alone give us any, not even enough for the two Seder nights. What they were willing to sell us were the old Matzoth, which they had received from the Joint in America in 1939, the first year we were there. These Matzoth were by now three and four years old and no longer kosher for Pesach.

Even though these people made so much money during the war years, they never helped any of the emigrants, not even the few old people among us.

Partisan Activities on an Increase

The fall and winter of 1942-43 passed without any particular incidents that I can recall. The activities of the resistance forces, the partisans led by Enver Hoxha, became more and more aggressive and carried out many guerrilla attacks on Axis forces. Since Albania did not have a railway system, all goods had to be transported by trucks from the port cities to the interior of the country. The truck drivers, who were our laundry clients, feared these partisan attacks very much and, even though they drove only in large convoys, they were nevertheless overpowered and the guerrillas confiscated their cargo. By 1943, their activities spread to the large cities as well and they carried out many attacks and acts of sabotage on military installations. By this time, the Casaleggios lived in their new apartment on the beach and I spent most of my free time with them, mostly enjoying their daughter Elsa.

Many of the Italians who had come to Albania with their families began to get nervous as to what was in store for them if either the Allies were landing on the Balkans or if the partisans would occupy the country. During the early part of 1943, many Italian families left on their own accord and went back to Italy, among them Signora Casaleggio and Elsa. We took them to the boat in Durazzo and it was very sad to bid them farewell. Enrico remained for several months and then also left. The Germans eventually sent all those Italians who remained home in large convoys of trucks via Yugoslavia and ending up in Trieste. In the course of the years, we became very good friends with another Italian, Aleandro Guiducci, also a truck driver and owner of a fleet of trucks, who was in Albania together with several other members of his family. They were among those evacuated by the Germans in the winter of 1943-44.

My Parents' Arrest

During the early part of 1943, we continued to live in the farmhouse in Shkoset, Durazzo and my parents continued with their laundry. Aside from some friends we had made among the Italians who were also our customers, our main social contact was with the Pilkus. My father and Ing. Pilku often played chess together, and I used to love to just sit with them and watch for hours.

It was during the early summer that my parents, returning home from a visit to the Pilkus, were seen by a police lieutenant who was known to be an anti-Semite. He recognized them and had his car stopped. One of his guards got out and arrested both of my parents, claiming that they had no residential permit for Durazzo and that they were supposed to have remained in Berat or Lushnje.

It was many hours after they had been taken to a prison and put into isolated confinement that Ing. Pilku found out about it, even though my parents had repeatedly asked that the authorities contact him. When the issue of residence in Durazzo had come up several weeks earlier, Ing. Pilku had assured my parents that he would take care of this matter and settle it with the proper authorities. What apparently had taken place was that either he had not dealt with the matter as promised, or else this lieutenant had disregarded the permit, which supposedly had been issued to us and just wanted to flex his muscles. I remained with the Pilkus for the duration of their imprisonment. For four days my parents were held illegally in detention under inhuman conditions. The food was inedible, there were no sanitary facilities and the rats were running around freely and attacking the inmates if they did not leave food for them on the floor. My poor mother, who was so afraid of mice and rats, was simply terrified. I was terribly fearful of not seeing my parents ever again and even though the Pilkus were very nice to me, I could not wait until they came back.

I remember thinking that perhaps I had been disobedient and that, therefore, I was being punished--I was ready to do anything just as long as I would never be separated from my parents again. Thank G'd that after four days they were released and this time all legal matters had been properly taken care of. However, only very recently did I find out from a relative of the Pilkus that Ing. Pilku had asked the Minister of Interior, Mr. Rifat Begolli, to help in obtaining the release of my parents. The fear of being separated again and left with strangers never left me for years to come. It was among the more traumatic experiences of my childhood. We went back to our home in Shkoset and resumed the work in the laundry and, in general, life continued as before until the German occupation, which was soon to follow.

In all these years, we had had almost no contact with the family in America. The only possible means of communication was via the International Red Cross, which meant that no more than 20 words could be written and no more than once every six months. I do remember that we received no more than two or three such short messages from the States. The first one to arrive must have come after several years of having been completely cut off from each other. We had always speculated whether the Baers had had another child, and when that first message came and they made no reference to such an addition, I remember being very disappointed.

German Occupation of Albania

As already stated, July 1943 brought the much feared German occupation forces to Albania. One morning when we got up and opened our door, we saw much to our surprise and shock a group of German soldiers not far from our home in the field, manning a machine-gun position. We did not dare speak a word of German for fear that they might hear us and come to find out who we were. In the course of the day we left our house, took a few belongings and went to the Pilkus. Ing. Pilku took my father with him immediately to a very small village²⁴, where he was doing construction work and my mother and I remained in their home. We were introduced to everyone as though we were relatives living with the Pilkus and helping with the housework.

Very soon after the occupation, German officers started coming regularly to the Pilku home. They were not just Wehrmacht officers, but SS officers. We had many very close calls, and I don't know how my mother managed at all times to remain cool and outwardly calm. We lived in constant fear that someone would expose us. We had no valid documents and had agreed that if we were ever asked for our papers, we would say they got lost (an unlikely story, which probably would never have been accepted). We heard from my father infrequently--only when Ing. Pilku happened to be in the village.

We did not dare go back to our home and, therefore, had only the barest necessities with us. To the best of my recollection, this set-up continued for about two months. At the end of this period my father had to come back to us despite the risk involved. He feared going blind, a manifestation caused by loneliness and nervousness. He had no one to talk to--he did not speak Albanian at all and the little Italian he spoke no one else understood. Much later on we found out that a Jewish couple, who had crossed the border from Yugoslavia in 1941, had been living undisturbed in that small village until my father appeared. One day, when they saw him in the street, they were sure he was a German spy and for weeks did not dare leave their home during daylight hours. They were sure he had been sent there to find Jews like themselves who were hiding. We only met that family two years later when we were all getting ready to leave Albania for Italy.

Once, during an afternoon tea party at the Pilku home, attended by a number of high ranking SS officers, one of them in conversation with my mother boasted that if confronted by either a Jew or a communist, he would kill him on the spot. This gave my mother a great feeling of "security," indeed! All Italian soldiers who were still in Albania were rounded up by the Germans and deported to Italy. One day there was a tremendous explosion not far from the Pilku home. As we later found out, a hand grenade had been thrown into a passing truck loaded with Italian soldiers. The culprit was the same SS officer. Most of the soldiers were killed on the spot!

During this time, my only friends were the sons of the Pilkus, Edip and Luan. The only other friend I met during the summer of 1943 was Erika Permeti.

I remember seeing Erika and her friend Sylvia Wallach, often. They were usually walking along the beach. They always looked so happy and carefree and I wished I had such a close friend, as these two seemed to be. It was not until the winter of 1943/44, after we had moved to Tirana, that Erika and I became close friends. This friendship lasted until we left Albania in September 1945. We did not see each other for 47 years. When we finally met again, we picked up where we left off!

²⁴I think the place was called Kruje

Soon after my father came back to Durazzo we looked for a new place to live. It was too dangerous to remain in the farmhouse, since everyone in the neighborhood knew that we were Jews. We were able to rent the summer home of the Permeti and Wallach families. We rented half the house, the Permeti's side, which consisted of only one bedroom and a kitchen. There were no indoor sanitary facilities, only an outhouse. It was shortly before the High Holidays, which were probably the saddest during all those years. We were alone in Durazzo, no Minyan and afraid to even remain at home for any length of time. German soldiers were rampageously searching all along the beach for partisans who might be hiding in the deserted homes.

I remember that all through Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur we took long walks, just so we would not be home. Indeed, one morning during that time, it must have been very early and we had just gotten up, my mother was sweeping the stairs while waiting for the charcoal oven to light, when suddenly a Wehrmacht officer and several of his soldiers appeared on the scene. The officer introduced himself, was extremely friendly and told my mother that he had heard about the German family who was living in this house and that he had come by several days before to visit us, but that unfortunately we had not been home. That was apparently on Rosh Hashanah, when we purposely had gone away for most of the day. My mother remained extremely calm, having enough presence of mind to lock, from the outside, the door of the room my father was in. When asked where he was, she said that he had gone to Tirana looking for a place for us to live. She gave our name as Richter, a very German sounding name, and acted absolutely relaxed and natural. She invited the officer and his crew for coffee and they made our house, or rather the kitchen, their headquarters for the day. The soldiers went along the beach searching for partisans and came back from time to time to report to the officer.

The attached translation of a document clearly explains what happened while these Germans used our house as their headquarters for the day. It took more than 50 years before I found out.

Translation from an Official Document

The Albanian State
Ministry of the Interior
Department of Political Affairs

Tirana (probably dated) Nov. 24, 1943
Concerning: Arrest of individuals
From Durazzo and Shijak

To the head of the Ministry – Tirana

Please note, we have the pleasure to transmit to you herewith, the telegraphic notice from the Mayor of Durazzo, dated November 22, 1943 as follows:

“On the 20th of this month (November) the German authorities, after a thorough search in the city of Durazzo among the citizens, arrested 569 Albanians and 38 Italians. While in Shijak 37 Albanians and 44 Italians were arrested. Some of the arrested individuals were taken to Tirana by the German Authorities.”

(Signed) The Minister

Nr. 169 Res.
24. XI. 1943

In the meantime, they took photos with me, declaring that with my long braids I looked the prototype of a German girl. As a special "treat" they took me for a walk along the water and threw a hand grenade into the water to show me what happens – lots of dead fish. They must have stayed for most of the day which, to us, seemed like an eternity. When they finally left, they promised that they would be back to visit and hoped that next time my father would be home as well. My mother completely collapsed at the end of that ordeal and my poor father could finally come out of the room. He had sat on the bed, not daring to move a muscle. In a suitcase under the bed was a set of Machsorim²⁵, his Talit²⁶ and Tefilin²⁷, as well as other Hebrew books. It could have been all over for us on that day. It was a very close call! G'd was good and protected us once again.

Orders for the complete evacuation of Durazzo had been issued by the German military command at about this time, since the entire city of Durazzo was to be mined. The Axis expected an Allied landing on the shores of Albania. I think that by December the city had to be completely empty and only some shopkeepers were permitted to open their stores for a few hours a day, but they too had to live outside Durazzo.

²⁵Prayer books for Festivals

²⁶Prayer Shawl

²⁷Leather straps worn by men during morning prayers

Escape by Sailboat

Before we left Durazzo, another unforgettable event took place. After the Allied Forces had occupied Italy in September 1943, many of the Yugoslavian Jews, fearing the Germans, tried to escape from Durazzo by sailboats to Italy. One day Ing. Pilku came home from the city, telling us that he had heard that a group of Yugoslavian Jews would try that very evening to sail on a self-constructed boat for Bari or Brindisi. Indeed, in the course of the afternoon we saw a group of people unload on the beach, under the eyes of the Germans, a very large sailboat which was also equipped with a motor. It took them all afternoon and well into the evening to load the boat with provisions, personal belongings, etc. As soon as it became night, the passengers boarded and the boat was launched. Despite the fact that the entire harbor of Durazzo was heavily guarded by German patrols and huge searchlights constantly guarded the entire coast, they hoped that they would be able to get out of the territorial waters without using their motor and thereby remain undetected.

The Pilkus again acted completely uncharacteristically. They immediately decided to go down to the beach, walk up and down and occupy in conversation any German soldier who might by chance patrol the seashore. I remember going with them down to the sea. The atmosphere was very tense when about 100 passengers, men, women and children, began to board the boat. Everything happened in absolute silence and in complete darkness--they had chosen the particular time of the month when there was no moon. Finally, the boat left and no German had arrived. We waited around for a while, but nothing happened, not a sound was heard. The powerful searchlights never caught the boat! All night we wondered whether they would indeed make it across to Italy or whether they would be caught, or perhaps blown up by a mine? The next day we found out that not only had they made it out to sea without being detected, but also since they had developed engine trouble, they had to return and would make another attempt the next night. They did indeed, and we again went down to the beach, trying to prevent Germans from spotting them. They succeeded the second time and, for all we know, made it all the way to Brindisi. Several other boats made such daring attempts, but we never found out for sure whether they succeeded or not. It was all very exciting and very frightening to me. Perhaps whatever fate met them was better than being caught by the Germans and executed.

Moving to Tirana - December 1943

As mentioned before, we were very close friends with Aleandro Guiducci and had decided to move with him and his two relatives to an apartment in Tirana. Since they had a truck, it did not cost us anything to move our few belongings. We found a fairly pleasant apartment in Tirana on the outskirts of the city. My mother cooked for them and they paid her for it. I remember that it was a very cold winter, Tirana being by far colder than Durazzo. Once again, the toilet facilities in this apartment were very primitive and so in order not to go outdoors during the cold nights, Alexandro provided himself with a chamber pot, which he used to leave outside the house during the day. I thought it was terribly funny for an adult man to use a chamber pot. I never played tricks on anyone, but this time I decided to play one on him. One day, without telling anyone, not even my mother, I hid the chamber pot and at bedtime he looked everywhere for this indispensable object. He accused his two relatives of hiding it, but he never suspected me. The next morning I got up early and replaced the pot in its usual place. When he got up and saw it, he was flabbergasted. I can still hear him say, "Ecolo!" there it is! It was only many weeks later that I confessed having been the culprit.

This was only a brief funny interlude in an otherwise very critical situation for us. In the meantime, the Pilkus also returned to their home in Tirana and still kept inviting us from time to time. During one of those invitations, a number of their German-Albanian friends and several Wehrmacht officers were invited as well. They were apparently insensitive to the potential danger such encounters could mean for us. During a particular afternoon at their house, one of the officers asked my father how come he was not in Germany fighting for the Fatherland. It was the last time that we went to visit the Pilkus.

Nazi Terror - Winter 1943-44

By the winter of 1943-44, the Germans were well established in Albania and, as in every other country, which they had occupied, here too they formed a local militia group, called Balisters. Their primary task was to counteract the ever-increasing activities of the partisans and to search for them everywhere. Arrests were made at random and the victims shot without much ado. Once a week there were public hangings, usually on Thursdays, which was market day. The partisans were hung in the marketplace, this was supposed to serve as a deterrent to others. In the course of the day, these ruthless militiamen would take the corpses down, tie them to horses or donkeys, and drag them through the streets. We made sure never to leave the house on Thursdays. It was so terrible and frightening. My mother and I once were in the market and saw all this horror. We did not understand, at first, what was happening. The Balisters had another pastime; they would force their way into people's homes in the middle of the night and demand money. If they did not get any, they would just fabricate some pretense and arrest anyone they wanted to. I remember one occasion when they came to the yard in which our house was located and, of course, demanded money from the Italians, knowing that they all had sold their trucks and, therefore, were loaded with money. Our Italian friends wanted my parents, "as Germans," to speak with those criminals and convince them to go away. They simply could not understand the potential danger all this implied for us. Thank G'd the Balisters never realized who we were.

By this time, there was a curfew from sunset to sunrise; nevertheless, the partisans were very active even in the populated centers of major cities. Shooting went on all night long. Nightly arrests were made and more young men went to the mountains to join the guerrilla forces of Enver Hoxha, which were under the command of Tito.

A Lovely Friendship of Short Duration

I met Lilla, a wonderful Italian girl about my age, but unfortunately paralyzed in both legs as a result of polio, which she had contracted as a small child. She was just beautiful and a lovely person. I was about 13 years old by this time and very much in need of friends. All through the years I had no friends at all, the only other young person among the emigrants was Julie Wolf, and even he was 10 years older than I was. Lilla and I became inseparable friends and I would spend hours with her. She walked with braces on both legs and I felt terribly sorry for her. She was brave and never complained. She came from a large family of which she was the oldest. Her parents, too, were very nice people and always very hospitable. All Italians who had not returned earlier on their own were forced by the Germans to return to Italy in February 1944. I lost a dear friend that way. Hereafter, Erika Permeti and I became close friends. We got together almost daily, read the same books and shared many other common interests.

Acquaintances Made in Tirana

In Tirana once again, my parents made contact with the local office of the International Red Cross in order to send messages to the Baers and Omama. In the process we met two Red Cross employees. Both of them were helpful to us in their own way. One eventually became our last landlord in Tirana, while the other, a pharmacist named Erebara, was very helpful to us. He turned out to be a very ardent supporter of the communist party. Incidentally, the two men were archenemies and the latter had our landlord arrested when the new regime came to power.

After our Italian friends were expelled from Albania and taken by the Germans back to Italy, we were once again on the move to find another apartment. We could not stay in the old one for several reasons. There were too many high-ranking German officers living in the immediate neighborhood, which became too dangerous, and furthermore, once everyone was gone, the place was too large and too expensive for us. Before we moved on March 18, 1944, the Vesuvius near Naples erupted and within a few days the ashes and lapili, mainly a hard and sandy powder, were driven across the Adriatic Sea by the wind and everything was covered with black ashes. The superstitious Albanians could not understand what was happening and were going around pondering what mysterious sign from heaven this might be. Some people were telling us that even the oldest among them could not remember that there had ever been black rain! I think the fallout lasted for about a day or so.

The need for a livelihood became a major factor. The laundry business was over, since truck drivers were all gone, and besides, Tirana did not have a beach as Durazzo had; one could not start washing clothes in the middle of the city. Even though this was Tirana, the capital, there were only a few places with running water, which was, of course, cold. The place we lived in did not have running water. The house we lived in with Aleandro and his relatives had a well in the yard.

My Parents' New Occupation

My parents had to make a cold-blooded decision and take great risks. They became merchants-- they bought wholesale cosmetics, toiletries, socks, stockings and many other small items of this sort. They would then resell them to retailers and in the process make a small profit. My parents always went together for fear that something might happen if they were identified as Jews. They had many very close encounters with German soldiers, but somehow never raised suspicion. I usually stayed home, which my parents always considered safest. It was during this time that I read a great deal, mostly in Italian. Some of my young Italian girlfriends had left me their teenage libraries, which were called Biblioteca delle Signorine. I adored those books at the time, as did Erika.

It was during one of my father's regular business rounds that he met an acquaintance, a German civilian of very doubtful background and reputation. For many years he had been in Albania and was considered to be a member of the Fifth Column²⁸. My father, this time alone, had met him in the street and was standing talking to the man when a truck half-filled with German soldiers suddenly pulled up. The soldiers jumped off the truck and surrounded everyone who happened to be in the neighborhood. The German acquaintance gave my father a sign to get away as quickly as possible, and it was by a mere miracle that he was not caught. He ran into a side street and disappeared in someone's backyard.

28 Fifth Column – A group of people who act traitorously and subversively out of a secret sympathy with an enemy.

The Long Anticipated and feared Registration at SS Headquarters

Around April we moved once again, this time to a room in the home of three Albanian bachelors whose families lived in the country. I don't remember where we had met them or who they were, but we did have a nice room and somewhere in the backyard there was some sort of a kitchen. There was no running water and not even a well in the yard. We had to carry water from the corner of the street, where there was a faucet. One uses very little water for anything when one has to carry it by the pail. Pesach of 1944, which I hardly remember, was during the most critical period. The Germans had just posted announcements that all foreigners had to register at Gestapo Headquarters. All Jews, those who had been with us from the beginning, the Yugoslavian Jews who had been in Kavaje and the two families from Greece, were now living in Tirana. We were spread all over the city, but saw each other frequently and consulted with each other constantly. The big question on everyone's mind was should we ignore the order for registration or should we comply and then hide or leave for the mountains and join the partisans. It was finally decided that everyone would go and register since otherwise, if caught, immediate imprisonment and probable death were assured, having defied German orders.

A horrible period of tension began after the registration, of course. The Germans had written "Jude" next to everyone's name. So, we all knew what would be awaiting us; we just did not know when. We still did not know at that time that there were death camps. All we knew was that there were forced labor camps. We still kept contact with the Pilkus even though we no longer visited them. My parents had made the acquaintance of a cousin of Ing. Pilku, whose name was Nefail Eskuli. Even though he was a known supporter of the monarchy he was a liaison officer between the German occupation forces and the Albanian Government. He advised us not to join the partisans, since that in itself was very dangerous and living conditions were impossible. He made arrangements with a farmer he knew, to take us, when the time came, to some village outside of Tirana. We trusted him and were confident that he would know when the right time would come. He knew exactly what was going on at Gestapo Headquarters. Some of our friends had panicked and had joined the partisans. They survived, but under very difficult conditions, and it had been very difficult to have them released when we all left for Italy.

When we moved we had no idea what the neighborhood was like. Besides, we did not have many choices. The city was overcrowded since the evacuation of Durazzo and we were glad that we had found a halfway livable room. It turned out that the house next door was a house of prostitution, which was frequented by German soldiers and officers day and night. Fortunately, all houses in Albania were built around a yard, which in turn was surrounded by high stone walls and the only access was through a huge wooden portal, which was always secured by iron bars from the inside. Unfortunately, though, hardly a day went by that some drunken soldier did not mistake our house for that of the brothel and knocked on our portal. This could happen in the middle of the night, and they would knock and shout in German, demanding that the portal be opened. It always caused tremendous fear and apprehension when it happened and usually my parents did not bother to open the door. Neither did the Albanian family. One of the three was a young man who had joined the partisans and there was always the chance that someone had denounced him and that the Germans were coming to arrest him. The entire situation was most ambiguous and dangerous. It was precisely during those months, in the spring of 1944, that I became more and more convinced that I would not live beyond a few more weeks. Every night before going to bed I used to pray to G'd to let me live just a little longer.

By the way, I was not supposed to know what was going on in the house next door to us, and I

really don't remember what I thought was going on!

The partisan activities continued nightly in increasing intensity and the young man, Betri, was absent more and more often during the night. The arrests and hangings also continued and intensified. The daily consultations among the emigrants resulted in ever greater uncertainty as to what action to take--join the guerrillas or wait until the deportation orders came, or would that be too late? Whatever plans were made one day, were changed the next. We were all living in different parts of Tirana and it was always a hike to get together with the others.

Our only contact with the outside world was a German language newspaper, published in Tirana, as well as a German radio broadcast, also from Tirana. We heard, of course, the BBC nightly at someone's home, they had a short-wave radio. Most mornings I would help my mother clean up the rooms of the men and, while doing so, would listen to the radio. My father would usually be there as well and listen with me. It was the morning of June 6, 1944, when my father and I heard the long-awaited news that the Allies had landed at Normandy. The broadcast simply said: "At 12:15 a.m. allied forces landed at Normandy." We were elated; we could not believe that it had actually happened. We could not believe that, after all, there might be a glimmer of hope that the Axis would be defeated, that perhaps we would survive after all. It was too much to hope for and too much to comprehend. I remember both of us running to where my mother was and telling her. Yet, the fear that in the last minute we would still be deported just could not be dismissed! The German occupation forces acted as though nothing had happened and their arrogance and super-race attitude had no bounds.

Attempted Assassination of Hitler

About a month later, on July 20, 1944, in view of the desperate military situation, a group of high-ranking military and civilian officials executed a plot against Hitler. They placed a time bomb, which was concealed in the briefcase of one of the generals, under the table at which Hitler and many of his generals and advisors were sitting during a meeting. One of the men, unknowingly, pushed the briefcase somewhat away from Hitler's vicinity, thereby saving his life, and Hitler was only slightly injured. Psychologically, this act carried great weight, indicating that there were those who had come to the realization that Germany was about to lose the war and who were ready to overthrow the regime.

As far as we were concerned, and that was probably true about every Jew still alive throughout Europe, it represented some hope! In the meantime, the activities of the underground forces throughout German occupied Europe became more intense. The Russians advanced on the Balkan States and Rumania was liberated in August 1944, Bulgaria in September 1944, and Yugoslavia in October 1944. The Germans held on to Albania, since they needed an exit route for their retreating forces. The native guerrilla movement under General Enver Hoxha launched an all-out attack on the German forces. They not only caused heavy losses to the Germans, but also liquidated in the process their anti-Communist opponents. On the other hand, the pro-fascist Balisters, under the orders of the German forces, increased their reign of terror throughout Albania and the arrests of suspected partisans increased by ever-larger numbers, and so did the public hangings. Our own position became more and more dangerous and our deportation more and more imminent. As the summer of 1944 slowly turned to fall, the shooting in the streets became more and more intensive. Curfew began in the early hours of the afternoon and lasted until the next morning. We never knew whether it was German forces shooting at suspected Communists or vice versa. I remember many an evening we would lay on the floor seeking protection from whatever piece of furniture seemed a little massive.

The Move to Our Last Lodging in Albania - At Last

In all this confusion, terror and ambivalence, we had moved once again, not far from where we had lived but a little less exposed to the main street. At least it was away from the family whose nephew was by now a full-fledged member of the partisan forces and who had already been sought by the police several times. Our own position in that environment became very dangerous. This time we moved to the house of one of the Red Cross officials whom I mentioned earlier. He was a Royalist, which at the time did not mean too much to us. This was, finally, the last apartment we would move to, and from there we left Albania. This house consisted of three rooms, each of which opened to an inside yard. There was a kitchen at one end and an outhouse at the other. The owner inhabited one of the rooms. A Jewish couple from Yugoslavia occupied the middle room, and we had the room right next to the kitchen. My parents continued their merchandising and I took care of the house and the food. Shortly after we had moved in, the Yugoslavian woman had a self-induced abortion right in the outhouse. She called my mother in the middle of the night for help; notwithstanding the curfew, my mother courageously took her straight to the hospital. I do not remember what happened to them, but shortly after this event they moved out.

Thereafter arrived the aunt and uncle of the owner. They were living in a village, but their young daughter was very ill, so they brought her to Tirana to see a doctor. The girl must have been about eight or nine years old and was very ill by the time they arrived. Her illness was diagnosed as leukemia, so it was only a matter of waiting for the end.

One day I was home alone, and a holy man and some women who were professional mourners came to sit by the child's bedside. We had not realized that she was about to die. Quite innocently I stood around watching what was happening, when suddenly the holy man produced a young chicken that he killed by cutting it in half and placed it--just as it was, blood and all--on the head of the dying child. I could never forget this incident with all its ramifications. The child died that same evening and they took her back to the village for burial. After about a week the aunt and uncle came back to the house and remained there as long as we did. The High Holidays of that year were spent together with the Wolfs, but I don't remember many details.

By the time fall of 1944 rolled around, we almost never left home, except to buy whatever food was available. The Germans were pulling their troops out, but there were still enough left and our friend the liaison officer was very much on the alert as far as the date of our deportation was concerned. Underground forces were everywhere and by this time the home of anyone suspected of sheltering a partisan was blown up by the Germans. I remember one afternoon, shortly before the final major attack by the partisans on Tirana, I saw an entire house go up in the air and come shattering down. They certainly did not take the trouble to evacuate the inhabitants first. It was a horrible sight.

Final Battle Against the Nazis

It was October/November, 1944, a night like any other, with unceasing shooting. What was different, though, was the fact that the shooting continued even after daybreak and well into the morning hours. We did not know what had happened and were completely taken by surprise when, in answer to a knock at the front portal, which we opened reluctantly, a partisan soldier in uniform with a red star on his hat and jacket stood in front of us. During the night the partisans had occupied most of Tirana, though part of the city remained in German hands. Fortunately, we were on the partisan side of the street. Our house was the third from the corner and the main road was separating us from the enemy. The partisans told us to leave the house as soon as it would get dark and to go to a house which was a little further away from the main road and which had a basement. All neighbors were advised to take shelter in that particular house, at least for a few days. My parents quickly packed up a few belongings that they considered important and left everything else behind. Indeed, by the time we got to that house, the basement was very crowded with people and we all spent the night in that relatively massive shelter. The owner had quickly put down some mattresses and blankets and we all took turns sleeping. At some point during the night someone suddenly shouted that the entire city was on fire. We all rushed out to see and, indeed, the sky was red and flames were shooting sky-high. The Germans had set the old market on fire. Meanwhile, the fighting in the streets continued and there were heavy casualties on both sides. Soon after daybreak, when there was a lull in the fighting, my parents decided to try to make it to the Kral's (Hans and Anni) house. They lived way out of town, almost at the foot of the mountains outside of Tirana. It certainly was a dangerous venture, a distance of at least an hour's walk. Under the circumstances, every few meters we had to throw ourselves on the ground while bullets were flying over our heads, it took us over two hours to reach our destination. They were, of course, most happy to take us in. My parents left me there and rushed back to our apartment in order to salvage some more belongings. They were sure that our apartment would be completely destroyed since it was so close to the battle line. They managed to get back, pack a few more things and run back out of town. Just as they were crossing an open field, bullets were hissing over their heads and my father told my mother, in German of course, to throw herself on the ground. An overzealous partisan woman who was sure she had just uncovered German spies, overheard this and promptly arrested them both. She took them to the nearest field headquarters and booked them as spies. The irony of the situation was overwhelming. We had just been liberated from the Germans, who were just about to deport us, and here the liberators were arresting my parents as spies, ready to execute them on the spot. They felt very uneasy and frightened, especially since while they were kept waiting to be interrogated, an Albanian peasant was marched outside and shot. My father, in his usual militaristic manner demanded to be taken to the commander of the unit who, to their great fortune, turned out to be someone who had served at police headquarters in Lushnje and who immediately recognized my parents. He embraced them in typical Balkan fashion and set them free. They were thoroughly shaken up by the incident, though. The commander gave them an escort back to the Kral house and told them not to leave the house until the battle was over. He could not be responsible if such an incident reoccurred. In the meantime, many hours had gone by and the Krals and I were frantic as to what might have happened to my parents. They finally got back close to evening, after I already thought that something must have happened to them and that I would never see them again.

The Krals did not have much room in their old, shabby house. It was a real farmhouse, with nothing but wooden beams for ceilings and only clay floors. It was already getting cold and there was

almost no food to be bought. My parents slept in the so-called kitchen, which was the only living quarter besides two bedrooms. I shared a room with their elderly sister, Olga. The place was infested with rats, the size of cats. In fact, they were so big that every night when they came into the kitchen they would find pieces of soap weighing as much as a kilo and carry them away. My poor mother, who was mortally scared of rodents, had to watch these huge rats run overhead on the beams and at times even jump on their beds. It was a nightmare, to say the least. We could not go anywhere, except the immediate neighborhood in search of food. The Krals had raised rabbits, which they slaughtered, and which they claimed tasted like chicken. We did not touch that food, of course. I remember learning how to bake bread mostly from maize flour, which tasted really awful.

The shooting in the city continued, but at least from this place we heard it only in the distance and were out of immediate danger. The fighting in Tirana lasted 18 days, when finally one afternoon we heard the noise of airplanes. When we ran outside to see what was happening, we recognized the emblem of the British Royal Air Force. A few planes had finally flown over to Albania. They began to bombard the German lines of retreat and after several hours of bombing, the remaining German forces capitulated. We were at last free and safe from the Germans!

It was the 17th of November by the time it was over and we made our way back to our old apartment, which had indeed received a direct hit. One entire wall of our room had been blown out and, since our landlord had fled the city, his aunt, who had meanwhile reappeared, gave us permission to move into his room.

Nazi Danger was Over - Communist Danger Began

This kind gesture on the part of the aunt almost got us into serious trouble. One night, when we were all fast asleep, we heard a knock on the front portal. I guess Hamidea, the aunt, or her husband opened the door and before we knew what had hit us two policemen of the new Communist regime burst into our room and demanded that my father get dressed and come with them immediately; he was under arrest, they said. My parents remained calm and demanded to know what the charges were. It became clear that the person they wanted to arrest was our landlord, who by this time was already behind bars, but some overzealous official had not been informed. We made it clear to them, and the aunt and uncle verified the fact that their nephew was in prison. The officers apologized and left. However, we were left in shock!

Almost immediately after the shooting had stopped the arrests started. The Communists arrested anyone who had ever had any connection with either the Italians or Germans and brought before a so-called tribunal, which resembled Kangaroo courts. The prisoners were sentenced immediately and the verdict was usually carried out on the spot. In those first weeks after the liberation, thousands of anti-Communists were executed, among them our friend Ing. Pilku. We had never seen him again, did not know that he had been arrested and executed: shot from the legs up, which was their method of execution! It had become so dangerous under the new regime that we did not even dare visit or talk to Mrs. Pilku, so we never even saw her or her sons again.

Our landlord, it turned out, had been a staunch Royalist and apparently they had hoped that at the moment of Germany's defeat they could bring the monarchy back to power. He had slipped out of town together with other supporters just before the partisan invasion. They had hidden somewhere near the Bulgarian border, and then one night he was suddenly back. Within 24 hours of his return he had been arrested and put into jail. His aunt, Hamidea, and her husband were very faithful to him and visited him regularly in jail. Occasionally they took me along as well, which my parents were not supposed to know. They feared that if it became known that we had any contact with anyone in the opposition it could harm our chances of ever getting out of Albania.

A few of our emigrants had also been arrested for absolutely no reason at all. Hans Kral had gone to visit an Albanian friend and, when he got there, found a military guard in front of the door. Instead of leaving, he asked where his friend was and, when it became known that he was a friend of the prisoner, they took him along too. He only got out when we all had received our exit permits, which was several months after his arrest.

My parents continued where they had left off with their merchandising. Our first and foremost endeavor was to get out of Albania as fast as possible and off to Italy and finally, at long last, to our destination. However, as it turned out, we had to have a lot of patience until that goal could be achieved. The war in the rest of Europe was raging with fury. At least now we were able to listen to the BBC and the Voice of America openly and finally heard what was really going on all over Europe. As mentioned earlier, we had met Mr. And Mrs. Eribara, two Yugoslavs. They had no children and liked me very much. I spent a lot of time with them, and they were very nice and pleasant to me. Our own financial situation at this point was very bad, and we literally ate bean soup and dry bread every day. Despite that situation, we had a steady dinner guest, Herr Jacobson.

Herr Jacobson had been in Budapest from where he escaped on foot, somehow reached Salonika and eventually Albania. It later turned out that while he was in Salonika, he had worked together with a notorious Jewish spy, who had turned Jews over to the Nazis in order to save his own neck. In fact, the

name of that spy was well known in those days. Once, when he was alone with me, he told me in great secrecy that he had worked for that spy and that in return he had received a diamond ring from him, which he carried with him at all times. It was a rather large stone and struck me at the time as very strange, since Herr Jacobson was dressed in nothing but rags. He lived somewhere like an animal, but he had that ring. I never told my parents about it until much later, when we were already in Italy.

First Contact with the Family in New York

Soon after the liberation of Albania, both an American and British military attaché came to Tirana. My parents immediately went to the American mission, hoping that they could do something for us, which they could not. In the course of the conversation with one of the military personnel at the mission, my parents found out that the man's sister lived on the same street as the Baers and Omama. Even though he could not send one of our letters by military mail, he was able to write to his sister to go to the Baers and tell them that he had met us and we were alive and well. By January 18, 1945, we got a message via the American Red Cross from Omama, informing us that they had received the message from Mr. Reiner. On April 10, 1945, we got yet another message from the Baers, confirming again that they had received our message and telling us of their well being. This, then, was our first contact with each other after many years. It was also the first indication to the family that we had survived the war.

At Last, the End of the War

In the meantime, the war continued in the rest of Europe. Having evacuated the Balkans, the Germans resisted in Hungary until February 1945. Despite the fact that German forces were being defeated on all fronts, the deportation of Jews, particularly from Hungary, still continued. The Russians by now had entered East Prussia and Czechoslovakia in January and conquered East Germany. Some of the concentration camps, which were in the path of advancing Russian troops, were evacuated and blown up by the Germans and the inmates sent on death marches. During those marches most of those who had survived the camps perished on the roads. In March 1945, the Allies crossed the Rhine and overran West Germany. Germany's collapse came after the Allies and the Russians met on April 25, 1945, in Saxony. On April 30th Hitler committed suicide in the underground bunker of the chancellery in Berlin. Germany surrendered unconditionally on May 7, 1945.

What had really happened throughout Nazi-occupied Europe during all these years began to become known slowly and shockingly, as Russian and Allied forces conquered country after country and uncovered the horrors committed in the various concentration camps. We were literally glued to the radio every night and I remember clearly the unbelievable impact the reports from the liberated camps had upon us. Heretofore, we had no idea of the true nature of these so-called labor camps, which is what we thought they actually were. I shall never forget the report of an American or British soldier entering Bergen-Belsen or Mauthausen and describing how he found the remains of human beings hanging on butcher hooks. These reports went on night after night, and the full impact of what we had just escaped from hit us with full force.

The hundred or so odd Jews who had survived in Albania (this figure included those who had escaped from Yugoslavia), had now only one goal in mind and that was to leave Albania and finally reach their desired destinations. However, the new Communist Government of Albania had other ideas. Anyone in their hands would remain in their hands. They had liberated us and we were under their jurisdiction. Those of us who had been in Albania from 1938-39 were only 26 individuals. We turned to the Allied Missions for help but they, too, could not obtain exit permits for us. Most of the Yugoslavian Jews returned to their homeland, only a few wanted to leave for Palestine.

Cured by Christian Science

In June 1945, my mother became very ill as a result of a severe infection in her upper gum, caused by the use of non-sterilized instruments during a dental treatment. She ran a very high fever and there was no medication that would help her. Those were the days before penicillin, at least in Albania. She was getting worse from day to day and my father worried a great deal. From all the worries and tensions during the last year of the war, my father had lost a great deal of weight and looked like a skeleton. We no longer knew what to do for my mother! Suddenly, one day, a couple who lived two houses away from us and whom we had seen frequently take walks together, but had never met, came to visit. They had heard that my mother was ill and they wanted to visit her. It turned out that they were Swiss, their name was Martino and they had lived for many years in Albania. The man was blind and she did everything for him. In the course of the conversation it became clear why they had come to visit. They were both Christian Scientists who believed very strongly in the healing power of their belief, and the man told my mother that he could help her, but only if she completely believed in him. He would pray for her recovery. All he did was to put his hand on her face and the next day he came back again and did the same. On the third day, all of a sudden, she began to improve. We, of course, did not attribute her recovery to Christian Science or the man's prayers, but he was very gratified. He had made contact with members of the faith in America before the war and was completely convinced that his blindness would be cured, if only he could resume his contact with the sect in America.

Summer 1945, and Our Final Departure

Summer, 1945 saw a very severe epidemic of typhoid fever, primarily caused by the returning partisans who had lived in extremely unsanitary conditions in the mountains for so many years. Throughout the summer months, thousands of people died from this dreaded disease. Death notices were posted on tree trunks in Albania and one could see new notices daily. We were not permitted to drink water or eat fruits or vegetables without boiling them first. At last the Allies supplied vaccine to the country and it was compulsory to be vaccinated. When the Allies remained unsuccessful in obtaining our release from the Albanian Government, they resorted to blackmail. They threatened to withhold the vaccine if the government did not issue exit permits to all those who wanted to leave. It worked, and we were finally given permission to leave Albania in September. Arrangements had to be made with the British mission in Tirana to provide a vessel that would evacuate us from Durazzo and take us to Italy. There were many formalities and bureaucratic procedures to be taken care of prior to our departure. For one thing, any written items books, old correspondence, documents, etc. had to be censored in order to establish their innocent nature. The conditions under which we were given permission to leave the land were on the grounds of patriotism. The Government had been told that we emigrants wanted to go to our own land, Palestine. In fact, all documents we received from the Albanians clearly stated exit visa from Albania in order to immigrate to Palestine.

Since at the time I spoke fluent Albanian and Italian, I was sent by my parents with the items that had to be censored to the appropriate government office. I remember going there for several days in a row. An officer, who had absolutely no idea as to what he was looking at, especially when it came to the religious books (not to mention books and correspondence in German) released everything. Nevertheless, he went through everything page by page and then had one of his subordinates pack and seal every batch he had O.K.'d. When we unpacked in Italy, we found that the officer had enclosed many picture postcards of Tirana with flattering messages to me. Almost in every message he wished me all the best for a new life in Palestine! There was a tremendous amount of tension during those last few weeks in Albania because the date for departure had been set by the British mission and several emigrants who had been arrested were still not released. None of us were going to leave unless the authorities would free them and let them leave with us. On visiting day I went with Hamidea to visit her nephew, our landlord, and said goodbye to him. Our friend, Hans Kral, was still in prison and I saw him too on that occasion. He and the others were finally set free a few days before our departure and left with us.

It was during this last summer in Tirana that Erika and I saw each other almost daily. She would come to my house or I to hers and we would often sit in the garden and read our favorite romances.

The last Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur which we would celebrate in Albania and the first since our liberation, was upon us. This time even some of those who were not observant joined us in a Minyan that was held in the home of Hahim Vitali, one of the Albanian Jews. It was a most memorable and emotional event, especially Yom Kippur. Rosh Hashanah of the year 1945, was on September 8th and 9th, and Yom Kippur on the 17th of September. Succoth²⁹ was on September 22nd and 23rd. We had been scheduled to embark on Friday, September 28th, which coincided with Erev Shmini Azeret³⁰.

²⁹Festival of Booth (Tabernacles)

³⁰End Holiday of Succoth and Rejoicing in the Law

The embarkation took place in the afternoon, therefore before Shabbat and Yom Tov, but the problem was what to do once we arrived in Brindisi. The trip took 12 hours on a British freighter, which was not very large, and, since there were no cabins, we all had to spend the entire 12 hours on deck.

Before leaving Durazzo, my father and one other person went to see Mr. Jakoel, the dry-goods merchant, to ask him for some financial help for the two old people who were among us. After all, we did not know what was awaiting us once we got to Italy. They promptly refused. Later we heard that the Communists soon thereafter arrested them and confiscated all their money.

The long-awaited day had finally come. We were leaving Albania forever and would hopefully leave Europe soon after for our final destination--America! We arrived sometime during Shabbat, September 29th, in Brindisi and were received by officials from the UNRRA.

The Traumatic Confrontation with Reality

We finally set foot on free soil! The war over, the Germans had been defeated, the combined Allied forces were the victors, but little did we realize what unbelievable misery, poverty, destruction and famine had been left in the wake of the war.

Once we had disembarked in Brindisi, the question arose what to do next, since it was Shabbat and Shmini Azeret. Papa Wolf absolutely did not want to move from the harbor and wanted to be taken, on foot, to a hotel. After it was made clear to us that there were no hotels in the area and that we had no choice but to climb onto the trucks which the UNRRA had provided for our transfer to a D.P. Camp in Tricase Porto, we did as we were told. The trip on the open trucks took several hours from Brindisi through the countryside to the city of Lecce, in the Province of Lecce and from there along the coast to the very tip of the heel of the Italian boot, Tricase Porto. Since the driver of the truck was not sure to which D.P. camp he was to take us, he drove us through several, already existing camps, all occupied by survivors of the various camps and all already quite full. We passed through Santa Maria di Luca, Santa Caesaria, etc., all fishing villages, which are located in the Straits of Otranto, where the Adriatic Sea and the Ionian Sea meet. All these so-called D.P. camps were located in these most romantic fishing villages which were the summer resorts of the wealthy Italian city-dwellers. The UNRRA had confiscated these villages and turned them into D.P. camps.

I will never forget the first concentration camp survivor I saw as we were driving through Santa Caesaria. There, in one of the side streets, stood a young girl, probably not much older than myself, literally pulling her hair out and screaming at the top of her voice. She had actually gone out of her mind. I never saw her again, but the brief look I got of her and the impression it made upon me, I have never been able to forget. There was no room for us in Santa Caesaria and so the driver was told to continue to the next village, which was Tricase Porto. It had just been taken over by the UNRRA and was as yet almost empty. We arrived at dusk, were assigned living quarters, which were very nice, handed some blankets and air force sleeping bags. There was, as yet, no communal kitchen and we were given some army emergency rations for the night. It was the first rest we got since leaving Durazzo some 36 hours earlier and so, without too much delay, we settled down for the night.

When we woke up the next morning, we could not believe the beauty of our surroundings. In front of us the open sea, blue and calm, and above us a blue and clear sky. The houses we were assigned to were beautiful summer homes of wealthy city-dwellers. The sea was located somewhat below us, while the houses were built on elevated ground. There was no beach, it was rocky seashore and when we went swimming we had to jump off the rocks. We had been assigned a very large room, and after some days received wooden beds, mattresses and whatever else we needed to get along. Shortly after our arrival a communal kitchen was opened and we received three meals a day.

On our first morning in Tricase Porto, Julie Wolff and I decided to take a walk along the road to the center of this village and see what was going on and who else was there. We encountered only a few people, since the camp had not as yet been fully occupied. Those we did encounter were some Croats who had served with the Allied Forces and had not yet been repatriated. We spoke to them and were shown photos from some of the concentration camps: the piles of human bones, crematoriums, heaps of striped prison uniforms, and many other horror pictures. We were both so shocked by what we saw and heard and really did not believe any of it. I remember both of us going back home to our parents and telling them what we had been told and saying what anti-Semites those Croats were for spreading such incredible tales. However, we did not have to wait too many days until the full truth hit us with a heavy

blow. The camp filled up within the next few days and the number grew to 480 survivors of various concentration camps, mostly Auschwitz. These young boys and girls came from all over Europe: Poland, Hungary, Rumania, Germany, Lithuania, etc.

Life in Tricase Porto

Within a short time, we all got to know each other and we became good friends. The only aim most of these people had was to go to Palestine. The first thing they did toward that goal was to organize themselves into groups and kibbutzim, which then hoped to go as a complete unit on Aliyah Bet³¹ to Palestine. Life was very free. Either these young people came already as couples to Tricase Porto or they met there and immediately lived together in any one of the large buildings, which served as kibbutzim. Free love was certainly the order of the day. Naturally, my parents were very worried, especially when I began to spend much time with some of these groups. This was the first time in over six years that I found young people. We did not have all that much in common, though--I was, after all, the only person among 480 young people who had a mother and a father. Close to 100% of those with us were completely alone in the world. If there were two siblings, it was a miracle. I remember one day, someone coming from a camp in Trieste saying that there was a girl in Trieste and that she might be the sister of two girls who were with us. The very same evening these two sisters started out for Trieste in search of the girl who might be the third sister. They had come from a very large family of eight or nine children. After about two weeks they came back with their third sister!

This was such an unbelievable event, that the entire camp went crazy with excitement and joy!

The UNRRA, under the command of the Americans ran the camp. There was also a council made up of our own people. The communal kitchen was not kosher. Besides three meals a day we received everything we needed to make our life reasonably comfortable. Large shipments of old clothes arrived from America, which were distributed to everyone. At one time we got a shipment of shoes, black sneaker-type shoes, one style only, which everyone wore. They were ugly and horrible. My father called us all "Black-Footed Indians."

Many of our people who had come from Albania became very ill as a result of many years of poor nutrition and lack of proper medical care. The survivors were all in poor condition, even though this was by then about five months since they had been liberated. Absolutely no one had good teeth. Either they had been knocked out or they had rotted away from malnutrition. Besides, all the girls were very heavy, since in concentration camps throughout the years they had been given medication to prevent them from having their regular periods.

Not many months passed when the first couple got married. My mother was the proud owner of a white dress, which she was only too happy to lend to anyone who wanted it and could fit into it. So my mother's white dress became the "wedding gown" of many a happy bride. A rabbi would come in from one of the other camps and, before we left in August 1946, not many unmarried couples were left. In many cases, the first babies were born before we left. Hope for the future of our people had prevailed after all!

³¹Illegal immigration

The General Situation in Italy

Immediately after our arrival in Tricase Porto at the end of September 1945, my parents resumed their efforts, which had been interrupted by the war, to obtain the much-desired United States entrance visa. The American Consulate in Naples had not as yet resumed operations. Therefore, my parents directed their first inquiries to the HICEM (Hias-JCA Emigration Association) in Rome, who in November 1945, replied that they had just, within the last few days, opened their office and, therefore, had no pre-war documents on hand. They suggested that, in any case, my parents ought to obtain completely new affidavits and have all documents ready for when the American Consulate would commence work. They furthermore stated that there was as yet absolutely no possibility of leaving for the U.S. In December 1945, the same office once again informed us that the Consulate still was not in operation and that they had no way of knowing what had happened to all pre-war documents. In the meantime, my parents traveled back and forth to Bari, where food parcels from Omama, Baers and Hertha had arrived.

The mail in Italy was terribly unreliable and, even though going to Bari by railroad was a major undertaking, it was worthwhile since otherwise one ran the risk of having everything stolen. The parcels were magnificent! Food of all kinds! Things we had never seen before or not seen since leaving Germany so many years ago. Beautiful clothes for all three of us, and of course, American cigarettes, which in those days were more valuable than money. One could literally get anything in exchange for cigarettes. All of Europe was starved for food, for clothing, for cigarettes, for everything.

Tricase Porto was a small fishing village with a very poor population of fishermen. The wealthy merchants of the big cities occupied the houses we lived in only during the summer months. The local population benefited greatly by the influx of the survivors of Hitler's death camps. The UNRRA brought in food and whatever was not consumed by the inmates of the camps was hauled away by the local population. For one thing, I remember that we received bread in great abundance, which we could never completely consume. It quickly turned moldy due to the high humidity near the seashore. This did not prevent the Italian children from coming and begging for that bread. I also witnessed how Italian children, little children, used to fight over a cigarette butt, which had been thrown into the gutter. It was all there in post-war Italy--poverty, starvation, crime, destruction and the unbelievable remnants of a once-great, numerous intellectual and wealthy European Jewry. One adjective I am not using is "depressed." They were not! They had hope in the future; they had hope for a new life in Erez Israel; they had hope in their newly formed families. They were sad and ill, but they were not hopeless and in that fact lay their strength. They were absolutely ready for whatever lay ahead of them and whatever they had to sacrifice in order to obtain their only goal--a new life in Palestine. Sacrifice of any kind really meant nothing to those people who had already sacrificed everything!

By the spring of 1946, the first groups began to leave the camp on small Greek fishing boats bound for Palestine. This was my first encounter with Aliyah Bet. Those who remained behind would watch carefully for every news item about the British blockade of Palestine and the capture of fishing boats, which were then sent to Cyprus. Nevertheless, as often as a fishing boat became available another group was ready to take the chance and go. Once again, just like a few years earlier in Albania, we would stand at the shore and watch illegal immigrants leave for unknown destinations. The only difference was that if caught this time, it did not mean certain death!

We were at least able to be in constant touch with our family in New York and were trying to pursue our own goal, which did not get underway until February 1946, when my parents finally

received a first acknowledgement from the United States Consulate General in Naples. It stated that as yet there was nothing they could do, especially since there was no transportation to the United States. In March, the Joint informed us that the time had come to register with the Consulate and to furnish new documents, since the pre-war affidavits had become invalid. My parents traveled to Naples, which under normal conditions is a matter of no more than a few hours travel by train. However, the railroad system had been badly damaged and was in a terrible condition. The trains were cold, the windows were still broken and there was no light, whenever a bulb was put in, it was stolen. The trains were overcrowded and, if one was lucky to find a seat, one could not dare leave it for any reason whatsoever. My mother sat on her little overnight case for 30 hours, which is how long it took at this point for the journey from Lecce to Naples. She financed her trip by buying olive oil in Tricase and selling it at a very good profit in Naples. The big cities were short of everything. Since this venture was illegal, my enterprising mother had a metal container made to fit right into her suitcase. She succeeded both times that she took that gruesome trip. After one of those adventurous journeys my mother returned ill from total exhaustion; she had to be hospitalized in Santa Lucca. There was a regular army ambulance, which made daily trips to the hospital, and I went to visit her there. It was at one of those visits that I had an unforgettable experience.

How Profoundly Lives Were Changed by the Madness of the Era

Many different people had come to the camp. Survivors from many different concentration camps, partisan units in Russia and Poland, people who had been in detention camps in Morocco and Algeria, etc. Among all those people a young girl arrived one day, probably not too much older than I. She had been liberated from one of the camps by the Russians and had been raped by a Russian officer. When she arrived in the camp, she was already visibly pregnant. She told us that before coming to Tricase Porto, she had been at the Jewish Community Council in Rome and had made all necessary arrangements for the child to be put up for adoption and that she had decided not to see the child at birth. It had made a deep impression on me, and every time I saw this girl I could think of nothing else but the fact that she was going to have a baby which she would never see and which would be brought up by adoptive parents. I was horrified. The delivery of that baby coincided with my mother's confinement in the hospital and when I went to visit her, I ran into none other than the Russian girl; to my great joy and happiness, she had her baby with her. She told me then that once the child was born she had decided that it was hers, the only thing that was hers, and that no matter what hardship this fact would cause her, she would keep the child. She then told me that she had a brother in Palestine to whom she hoped to go and that they were observant people. She had feared that with an illegitimate child they would never accept her. That no longer fazed her--she kept the child. She came back to our camp after her maternity hospitalization and I remember that she was the last person I saw when we drove away from the camp in August 1946. We were on our way to the United States Consulate in Naples to finally receive our entrance visas to the USA.

I have jumped ahead in time. There were many things that happened during the 11 months of our stay in the camp. For one thing, I celebrated my 15th birthday in Tricase Porto and I remember that one of the presents I received were oranges, which had been picked off someone's tree. This was, after all, my first birthday in freedom after the war. My parents invited several of my friends and some of theirs, and we had a real party. One of the boys I was friendly with had been a cook in Auschwitz and he made real jelly doughnuts for the occasion. It was also during this time that I had my first boyfriend, Chaim. He had been with his mother and sister in the Warsaw Ghetto, from where he had escaped by hanging on to the bottom of the tramway which traveled through the Ghetto. He was lucky he had not been caught, since the Germans checked every vehicle that passed through the Ghetto. His sister had been hidden in a monastery and he thought that she had been baptized. He had not had any contact with her up to the time we left Italy. After his escape he had been denounced by Poles and sent to Auschwitz. When we met he was still very ill and did not have a healthy tooth in his mouth. He was very serious and wanted to marry me. My father was very serious and would not hear of it.

I had a very close girlfriend in the camp that had been deported to Auschwitz together with her mother. When they arrived there she saw her mother being taken to the gas chamber; she had been sent to work. Many months later when she was no longer able to work and her turn had come to be gassed, just when she and many others arrived at the so-called showers, the electricity failed and she was miraculously saved. Chaim had a good friend, Yankel, whom he had met in Auschwitz and they had remained together all those years. They had a mutual friend who came to visit at one time--he had been in one of Dr. Mengele's medical experiment groups and was castrated. I was so shattered by this revelation, I remember, that I could not get over that for a long time. The stories I heard from my friends got worse and worse and more and more unbelievable. The trouble was, they were all true!

Some people, as we began to find out, had been hidden in convents and monasteries--some had

yielded to pressure and had converted to Catholicism for the duration of the war, others would remain Catholics and really believed that it had been Jesus who had saved them. However, there were those who had remained steadfast and had not given in to the pressures, but rather were helped by the monks to keep kosher and observe Jewish laws, as much as possible. Many parents, in great desperation to save their children, gave them to Christian friends and neighbors in the hope that, if they survived the war, they would find their children healthy and alive as well as spared from all the hardships and suffering. In some cases that was indeed so. However, the majority of Jewish children who had been given to Christians had been baptized and brought up as Christians. One such case arrived in our camp in Italy. An elderly couple arrived one day with a young child which obviously was not theirs. It turned out that the couples were the grandparents who had survived the concentration camps and remembered that their children, already on the train that was to deport them to Auschwitz, had handed their little baby boy to a Christian neighbor with the request to safeguard him. Both parents of the little boy had perished, but the grandparents survived and upon release from the camps had returned to their birthplace in Poland and had searched for the child. In order to disguise his identity completely, even from other Christian neighbors, they had dressed this boy as a girl and brought him up as a Catholic girl. When the grandparents came back and looked for their grandson they could not find him because all the Polish family had was a girl. It took the grandparents quite some time until they became aware of the fact that this little "girl" was indeed their grandson. It was very difficult to obtain the release of the boy from the Polish family, not to speak of the fact that the grandparents were strangers to the child and he wanted to stay with the people he had learned to consider his parents. It was only after the intervention of a Jewish organization that the child had to be taken by force and handed over to the grandparents. They came to Italy with him and he was a very unhappy child. He kneeled nightly to say his Christian prayers. He was also suddenly regarded as a boy and no longer as a girl. The grandparents had their hands full to care for this poor child. It seems to me that eventually they left the camp for Palestine.

All of this just scratches the surface of the stories, life situations, destinies and tragedies we heard, saw and lived with every day during the 11 months of our stay in Tricase Porto. This was also the first time that I heard the term "Muselmann" being used. It was a Nazi camp slang word for prisoners on the edge of death. When someone showed the symptoms of the last stages of hunger, disease, mental indifference and physical exhaustion, he was called a Muselmann.

In addition to making friends among the other inmates of the camp, I also made the acquaintance of some of the Italian families who were living in the village. In particular, I became very friendly with a young woman who was living with her blind father, who once had been a music critic in Rome. They had lived in Tricase Porto during the entire war years. She invited me to their home and she lent me many books to read. Among the books I read was Arabian Nights, which gave me nothing but nightmares! I read many wonderful books during that time, and we enjoyed each other's company thoroughly. Her blind father used to play the piano often when I came. The winter months of 1945-46 passed with many new pleasures such as reading, my friends in the various "Kibbutzim," and an occasional Hebrew lesson.

One of my regular nightly occupations was to translate from the daily Italian newspaper the serialized story of Mussolini's rise to power, reign and life with his mistress, Clara Petacci. Partisans had caught them on April 26, 1945, while trying to escape into Switzerland. They were shot on April 28th and their bodies were later brought to Milano, where they were strung up by their heels from lampposts in a public square before being buried in an unmarked grave. The story was fascinating, and

I remember how our room would fill up every evening for months on end with friends who came to listen to my translation of that story. There was always hot tea and cake or doughnuts for all. The translation of that story was soon followed by the translation of the daily reports from the Nuremberg Trial, which had begun on November 20, 1945, and continued until October 1, 1946. I did the daily translation of that trial until our departure from Tricase Porto. Those who came to listen to me were the victims of those who were on trial. To them, it was at least a small consolation to see those criminals being brought to justice.

The Search for Survivors

Apparently, as soon as the war was over in May 1945, the International Red Cross, as well as the Joint, HIAS and whatever other Jewish organization could be mobilized, began systematically to make lists of survivors. These lists became available as soon as they were compiled and additional names were added whenever possible. These lists were accessible to anyone who wanted to see them, primarily at the headquarters of the various organizations in Rome, Naples, Bari, Trieste and many other places. It is difficult to describe the significance these lists assumed--the hope that, perhaps, despite all, the name of a mother, father, sister or brother, or at least an aunt, uncle or cousin would appear. It was quite a disappointment when, after hours of searching through volumes of lists, not even a single relative could be located. With each new list hopes were high, and eventual disappointment more and more painful. One of the people who had come to Albania from Yugoslavia was Herr Kamiel. He came originally from Poland but had lived for many years in Gelsenkirchen, Germany, where he had been a merchant. His three children had been born in Germany and in October 1938, when all Polish Jews had been deported to the Polish border, he and his family had been among them. Several months after the deportation heads of families were given permission to return to Germany in order to liquidate their businesses and to take care of other affairs. Herr Kamiel also returned, liquidated his affairs, but instead of going back to Poland, fled across the border and somehow reached the Balkans and eventually arrived in 1943, in Albania. He was an observant Jew and soon became a good friend of my parents. When we arrived in Italy, he lived in the same house we did, in fact in a room immediately adjacent to ours.

Herr Kamiel was absolutely convinced that his teenage children had survived and that, as soon as he would get out of Albania and to Italy, he would find them. His hopes were very high when we arrived in Italy and immediately traveled to the various main cities trying to track down one or the other of his children. Unfortunately, all his efforts remained totally fruitless. Many years later my father met Herr Kamiel in New York. He had never found any trace of any member of his family. As mentioned, his room was adjacent to ours, we could hear him sit every Shabbat saying Tehilim. His family was among the millions who had vanished without a trace!

Everyone in the camp was trying desperately to make contact with someone--either family members who had been deported and who may have survived in one way or another, or members of the family who had left for overseas long before the war. Many remembered hearing of an uncle or aunt in America, or Canada, or Australia and everyone was writing letters here, there and everywhere. Now began the most agonizing period of all: the waiting for an answer. To find someone, anyone, whom one could call a relative, was the most important thing on earth. I remember so very well the daily waiting for the mailman. He was a little man on a bicycle and he came from Tricase to Tricase Porto with his mail sack. When he became visible on the top of the hill, everyone would automatically head for the post office and then began the wait for the lady behind the window to call out names. What anticipation every morning and what disappointment with every passing day which did not bring the desired piece of mail. The daily trip to the post office became the focal point of every day, the main activity for all. This anxious expectation for the mail delivery continued until we left and probably beyond that.

A terrible event took place in early spring of 1946. It became known that one of the men in the camp, Herr Konitzky, who originally had come from the Province of Posen and who together with his wife and son had been deported to the Kovno Ghettos in Poland and later to a concentration camp, had

been a Kapo. A Kapo's task was to carry out the orders of the SS and to ensure absolute control over the prisoners. There had been Kapos who had helped their fellow prisoners; however, there were those who imitated the criminal methods and conduct of the SS. Thus, the Kapo became synonymous with a cruel egocentric person who oppressed, tortured and exploited others in order to obtain special privileges for himself.

Several boys, I never found out exactly who was involved, ambushed Herr Konitzky one evening as he was coming home and confronted him with the fact that he had been a Kapo. He did not deny it, whereupon the boys took justice into their own hands and beat the man up. He walked around the camp for weeks with a bandaged head. Thereafter, the man was totally ostracized and hardly anyone would talk to him. A most disturbing incident, but entirely understandable.

Pesach 1946 was approaching, our first Pesach in freedom and finally a Pesach that we could properly observe with Kosher-le-Pesach food, or so we thought. After making a few inquiries my parents found out that the general kitchen would not be kosher, but that there would be one group, one "Kibbutz" whose members were primarily from Rumania, who had demanded kosher food and new utensils. My father went to the leaders of that group and asked permission to receive food from their kitchen for the week of Pesach. They agreed, but only if he was willing to pay a certain sum of money for the privilege. Not knowing any better, he agreed, thinking that they must have paid from their own resources for the food and new equipment. We had our first real Pesach after all those years, but when my father tried to organize a Minyan for the Jontef days he was unable to get ten men together who were willing to come and pray. It was a most upsetting revelation to see this total rejection of G'd, this total inability to believe in anything. For them, it had all ended in Auschwitz. I remember how difficult it was for my father to accept the fact that none of these young people could bring themselves to say at least Kaddish³² for their dead parents. My father, Herr Kamiel and a few others prayed together, but they did not have a Minyan.

It was many weeks after Pesach that my parents found out that the "Kibbutz" from which we had gotten the Pesach food had not paid for anything. They had received it all from the Jewish Community Council in Rome. When my father went to the leaders of the "Kibbutz" and confronted them with that fact, their reply was, "What do German Jews know from kosher? You were only interested in obtaining better food; therefore, we decided to make you pay for it." My father was so appalled by this that he took the matter to a tribunal, which eventually judged in his favor, and the "Kibbutz" had to reimburse him.

This was a very small Italian fishing village, whose population was very primitive and, of course, very devout Catholics. It did not take very long before the centuries-old libel of the Christian child's blood being used in the baking of Matzot was being spread around the village. I was asked to speak to the local priest and ask him to speak on the following Sunday from the pulpit against such vicious lies. Indeed he did and the rumors stopped.

All I remember from that Pesach was that at long last we had real kosher Matzoth and as many as we wanted. My parents had invited many of the young people who were our friends for the two Seder nights.

As the spring of 1946 slowly turned into early summer, our new papers from the States for the United States Consul arrived. My parents once again traveled to Naples to see whether things would

³²Prayer for the dead

finally move and we could at long last, after a delay of seven years, leave for the U.S. Once again, my father had problems with the Polish quota, only this time my parents were advised that my mother and I should leave as soon as we could since that would facilitate matters for my father. This time it would be the wife who would send her husband an affidavit and that would entitle my father to a so-called non-preferential quota. This time my mother agreed to leave, in view of the fact that it would speed up matters.

Throughout the spring and summer my father was painting wonderful pictures of the coastline. One of these paintings still adorns our dining room wall. By now our contact with America was constant and we also heard, aside from Omama, Baers and Hertha, from the Meyer family. The Baers had very good friends, the Grossmans, who had a daughter my age. She began to write to me, and after I arrived in New York she was very nice to me and for a while we were good friends. She still spoke German, while the Meyer children had completely forgotten the language, and so I had no way of communicating with them at the beginning.

In the meantime, things at the American Consulate made progress and my mother and I were quite sure that within a few months we would be able to leave for the States. My father, too, had decided that it would be better for us to go ahead, even if he had to remain for some months alone, and that it would speed up his own departure for the States. He had decided, however, not to remain in the camp but rather to move to Rome and enjoy the museums and galleries to the fullest.

Some of the other families who had been with us in Albania had meanwhile moved to other cities in Italy, like the Wolff family who had moved to Bari; while others had either left for Palestine or returned to Austria. We were among the last ones to leave Tricase Porto. Julie Wolff and I had become good friends during the time we were together in Italy. After all, I was by now a "mature" fifteen-year old and he, who was 10 years older, made me feel very important when he talked to me or even took walks with me. In fact, we had once taken a walk on a Shabbat morning toward the city of Tricase and suddenly realized that we were very late for lunch. Despite the fact that we both never rode on Shabbat, we accepted a lift from an Italian farmer on his truck, but had the good sense to get off just before we got into camp. For a while, that remained a deep secret between us. I don't think that we ever told either one of our parents. After they moved to Bari, my father and I once took a trip there and stayed with the Wolffs overnight. Julie took me out to the movies. I guess I must have been in seventh heaven. We never saw them again until one day, by chance, we met Mama Wolff and Julie somewhere on 92nd Street in Manhattan. Julie was married by that time and I had already met Abba.

My other suitor, Chaim from Warsaw, was very serious, as I already mentioned. My father forbade me to see or speak to him, which under the circumstances was very difficult to adhere to. I think that my poor father took that friendship more seriously than it was, because once I left for the States and started school and a completely new life, I never gave Chaim, another thought.

By now many people had left and new ones were coming into the camp. As was customary, every new person was pumped for information: where did he come from, what camp had he survived, whom had he known, etc. One day, indeed, someone came from the same small town in Poland that Papa Wolff had come from. Upon being questioned by him, the man told him that his old father had tried to survive by having himself enclosed behind a false wall with enough food and water to last for several weeks. The hope apparently was that the Germans would soon be defeated and Jews who could save themselves in the meantime would survive. Unfortunately, the old man was almost immediately betrayed by a Polish neighbor and killed on the spot. Papa Wolff came home from that encounter with the man, tore Kriyah³³ and sat Shiva for an hour.

³³To rent one's clothes as a sign of mourning

The Last Few Weeks in Tricase Porto

Warm weather came early to this beautiful spot of land and we could go swimming every day. There was almost no beach to speak of, so we would just jump into the sea off the rocks. My parents were always very worried about me, but there were always people around who swam well. It was also during this period that, besides reading a lot of Italian, I was introduced to the newspaper "Der Aufbau", which gave us our first glimpse of American Jewish life. My father simply devoured this paper. Being an ardent newspaper reader, he had been deprived of a German language newspaper for too long.

The camp had its own infirmary and supposedly a dentist. One day, out of the clear blue sky, I got a terrible toothache and when, after several days, it had not improved I went to the infirmary and the lady dentist took one look at my tooth and said that it had to come out. Well, it was easier said than done, especially in view of the fact that there was no dental chair in sight and she had hardly any instruments. She personally was amply endowed, and so proceeded pulling my tooth while resting my head against her bosom. Having had no dental syringe, she tried, unsuccessfully, to anesthetize my tooth with a regular one. All in all, it was a nightmare, but eventually with combined efforts of those who had to hold me down and the lady dentist, the tooth came out.

In the meantime, packages arrived constantly from New York, and for the first time in many years I had lots and lots of beautiful clothes. Besides clothes, all sorts of goodies kept arriving, including peanut butter, which I did not like and still don't. All in all, it was a pleasant and good spring and summer. Everyone seemed to find their way and a place to go--there was an atmosphere of hope for the future!

At long last, in July 1946, my mother and I were called to the American Consulate in Naples for our medical examination and formal application for an immigration visa to the United States. All three of us traveled to Naples and on July 11th appeared before the Vice Consul, Harold M. Granata, but not before we all had gone to one of the famous Italian public bathhouses. This was an experience not to be forgotten. We had not seen a bathtub since we had left Hamburg, let alone sat in a hot bath. This was luxury at its best. We stayed in Naples for a few days and then returned to Tricase Porto to await the final call from Naples to actually receive our visas. In the meantime, my father made arrangements to move to a Pension in Rome and we started to pack our suitcases, hopefully for the last time. On August 12, 1946, we obtained our entrance visas and on September 3rd we left Naples on the S.S. Marine Shark.

Separation from Papa and Farewell to Europe

Before our departure, we spent close to three weeks in a hotel in Naples and took daily sightseeing trips. My poor mother had unfortunately stepped on a sea urchin from which she had gotten a severe infection in one of her toes. However, she wanted to go with us everywhere and really suffered very much; in fact, so much so that no sooner were we on the ship that she was in the infirmary and had minor surgery on her foot. I went with my parents to Pompeii, the Vesuvio, Castellamare, museums, etc. The evening before our departure for the States I went with my father by cablecar up the Vomero. There were beautiful little restaurants all along the mountainside, and he had a beer and I a soft drink. We made many other day trips and had a wonderful and most memorable time during those last three weeks in Europe. The day of our departure finally arrived and we were very sad to leave Papa behind, even though we knew that he was in no danger and that he would be able to join us much faster than if we waited together with him. The Polish quota was still overloaded. Only by applying for her First Papers could my mother have my father come on the non-preference quota.

I will never forget, as long as I live, the sight of my poor father standing on the dock by the side of the ship and bidding us farewell. He was very sad and cried. The ship pulled away from the Italian mainland and my father's silhouette grew smaller and smaller. It was not until April 28, 1947, that we were reunited in New York.

Crossing the Atlantic

When my mother and I finally left the deck and entered our cabin, we found out that we were sharing a cabin with four other women, two of whom were also Germans--a mother and her daughter, Grete and Monica Rosenbaum. They were survivors of Bergen Belsen, from where they had been exchanged for German prisoners of war and had spent the war years in Casablanca, in a camp under British or American supervision. The other two were Italian peasant women who could not get it out of their system that there was plenty of food on board. They carried everything that they did not eat or which had remained on the dining room table off to the cabin and hid it under the bunks. The cabin began to smell from cheese and we could not understand what had happened. We became very friendly with Mrs. Rosenbaum and her daughter Monica, a friendship that lasted for many years thereafter in New York.

The journey took 15 days, arriving in New York on September 18, 1946. The Marine Shark was one of the Liberty troop transporters and, therefore, very primitive and poorly constructed. We encountered bad weather and about three days out of New York the ship hit a cyclone. The Captain cabled S.O.S. to New York because only a week before a ship had been lost at that same spot. We knew nothing about it until we landed in New York. What an irony. After surviving the war in Europe with all its dangers we could have drowned at sea, just three days before reaching our goal and our dream of the past seven years! The morning we finally arrived in New York was filled with excitement. Who would be there to greet us? How would they all look? Would Omama be all right? Finally, we began to see the skyline of Manhattan. What a sight and what an overwhelming sensation! We had the feeling that the skyscrapers were about to fall on us, it was all so fantastic.

Reunited at Last with the Family

Many hours later, when we finally landed and got off the ship, everyone was there: Omama, Hertha, Lotte, Eric and Steve, and even the two Meyers. We had not seen Omama for over seven years; Baers since March 1937, which was over nine years; Hertha eight years, and the Meyers since December 1940. I don't remember that there was even the slightest feeling of strangeness with any of them. In fact, when we arrived at their apartment at 20 Sherman Avenue, I felt as though I had never been separated from them, especially not for so many years. Steve and I became good friends right away, even though I was five years his senior. He was still a child, while I had already a lifetime behind me.

I was told immediately that, according to American law, I would have to register for school within five days of our arrival. The very next day my aunt went with me to school, where I was well received, even though I spoke no English whatsoever. Here I was, almost 16 years old and almost for the first time enrolled in a proper school. Besides going to school for less than two years in Germany, I had received some private instruction and had attended the Italian school in Durazzo for about two years. I was enrolled into the 8th grade at P.S. 52. Teachers, for the most part, were helpful and encouraging. Every little success I had was noted and encouraged. I learned English in addition to regular classes from a lovely black man who taught new emigrants to the United States. I learned very quickly and don't recall any real problems, except for mathematics, which I had never learned.

My class was doing algebra! My poor Uncle Eric had to sit down and start teaching me math from scratch. He had the patience of an angel and I learned slowly and enough to get along with the class. He sat night after night with me and tried to teach me something I had absolutely no talent for. Years later, Abba tried the same when I was in college, with the same success!

My mother immediately found a job, first in a factory, then as a companion to an elderly lady, and finally with Dr. Hess and his wife, Dr. Katzenstein. At the beginning she worked as a housekeeper and later as a medical receptionist, which she did for many years, until her illness in 1960.

The next main endeavor was to try and bring my father to the States as fast as possible. To achieve that goal my mother applied for her First Papers on January 30, 1947. My father finally joined us on April 28, 1947. He had been very lonely without us, despite the fact that he had lived in Rome and had tried to see as much as possible of that beautiful city. Since he was an artist, he enjoyed the city and all its art treasures even more than the ordinary tourist did.

My New Life

For me, life was very exciting--a new world--movie houses, concerts, stores in which one could buy whatever one wanted, new friends and school. I worked very hard and I succeeded, and by February 1948, I graduated from Junior high school and went to George Washington High School, from which I graduated in February 1950. I immediately enrolled at City College for evening classes and worked as a secretary during the day.

Right from the beginning, I made many new friends or renewed childhood friendships. Among the more meaningful relationships and those who had the greatest influence upon my life was Ruth Moeller, a girl who had been in my class in Hamburg and whose home was at all times open to me. She introduced me to many other young orthodox people, and I joined their group at the Congregation of Rabbi Breuer. The other person was Mrs. Feldheim, somewhat older than I, but a very warm and loving woman who had become a good friend of my mother and who had a great influence upon me and my future orthodox orientation. In those days, I was in great need of individuals who understood me and were able to guide me in the proper direction. My father was not yet with us, we had not yet settled into a place of our own, and I was still completely under the impact of the war years. So, between the warmth and understanding I received from my aunts, uncle and grandmother, and the help and guidance I received from my friends, I soon found the proper framework within which I was able to function.

Meeting the One Who Had the Greatest Influence Upon My Life

On January 15, 1948, the really important and decisive event took place--Abba and I met at my friend Alice's birthday party. This encounter resulted in a very happy marriage and a thoroughly content life; the foundation of our four wonderful children and the beginning of their own happy families.

All those who might ever read this account are well acquainted with the happy life and great times we all share and are so fond of.

Now that I have come to the end of these memoirs, I should like to thank my children for suggesting this project to me. I would never have done it otherwise. I can honestly say that I enjoyed doing it, but at the same time I have to admit that at times it was a very difficult and painful task. I went through seventeen years of my life almost step by step and relived the good times and the bad times. The joys, the happiness, the fears and the anguish, but it was all worthwhile, and I hope that I was able to convey to you, dear children, my past, my family and ancestors and, thereby, yours. Thank you for giving me this assignment.

I have tried to be as accurate as possible, using whatever limited background material was available to me. Unfortunately, there are only very few individuals left who were able to help me. However, after meeting Erika Permeti Toptani, after 47 years in 1992, she was able to help me with names of individuals as well as names of places. The meeting with Erika was the main reason that I felt the need to update this book. I also felt that it was important to include the fact that I was able to resume contact with Edip Pilku and that I succeeded in having his parents honored by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations.

First book writing:

Haifa, February 7, 1983

Second version:

Updated U.S., August 1996

Third version:

Updated U.S., June 2000

Appendix I – Hamburg Archives

Approval to accept Abraham Schickler as a citizen of Hamburg



Dem das hiesige Bürgerrecht nachsuchenden
Abraham Schickler
alt 26 Jahre, Handfaßbinder
gebürtig aus Rodenburg – Altona
wohnhaft Gildstr. 107.
wird hiemit attestirt, daß seiner Aufnahme
zum Bürger
von Polizeiwegen kein Hinderniß entgegen
steht.

Hamburg, den 28. April 1863



Der Senator und Polizeiherr
Carl Petersen

Geneigt,
Gebührt,
McGair,
Gehört,
Abraham

Es ist zu wünschen, daß der Herr Schickler, welcher die Aufnahme zum Bürgerrecht
bei der Polizei beantragt, auch die erforderlichen Gebühren zu entrichten imstande
ist, und daß er die erforderlichen Nachweise zu liefern imstande ist.

Application for citizenship of Hamburg of Abraham Schickler

N^o 983

den

7 Aug. 1863

Staatsarchiv Hamburg
Staatsangehörigkeitsaufsicht
B I



**Vorschrift für diejenigen
die das Bürgerrecht nachsuchen.**

Jeder, der das Hamburgische Bürgerrecht nachsucht, hat folgende Fragen schriftlich genau und gewissenhaft zu beantworten, auch, wenn er des Schreibens erfahren, eigenhändig zu unterschreiben, und dem vorbestimmten Bedde-Beamten, wenn er Bürger zu werden wünscht, mit den Beilagen und in Gegenwart eines Beistandes einzuliefern, auch dem Bedde-Beamten die etwa noch verlangten Nachfragen nachzuliefern, und die an ihn gemachten Fragen zu beantworten, und um so mehr alles der gemachten Wahrheit gemäß anzugeben, da er es mit in seinem Bürgereid zu nehmen hat, daß er die reine Wahrheit gesagt habe, und da ihm, wenn es sich später finden sollte, daß er die Wahrheit verheimlicht, oder unrichtige Umstände ausgesagt, nach Befinden der Umstände ohne weiteres das Bürgerrecht abgezogen, oder er noch überdies anderweitig bestraft werden.

1) Name und Alter,

(wer nicht das 22ste Jahr vollendet, kann nicht zum Bürger zugelassen werden; finden sich besondere Umstände, weswegen jemand früher Bürger zu werden wünscht, so muß er sich deshalb mit seinem Gesuche an E. Hochpreisliches Obergericht wenden, und dessen Entschliessung erwarten.) Frauenzimmer können nach zurückgelegtem 18ten Jahre zur Erlangung des Bürgerrechts zugelassen werden.

1)

Abraham Schickler
26 Jahr

2) Religion,

2)

mosaisch

3) Geburtsort,

3)

Radenberg i. Hainichen
(Hainichen i. Thüringen)

a) Bobet, wenn der das Bürgerrecht Nachsuchende eines Stadt- oder Land-Bürgersohn ist, des Vaters Bürgerzettel beigebracht werden muß.

a)

b) Wenn derselbe ein Fremder, und er aus einem deutschen Bundesstaate gebürtig, darzuthun ist, daß er überall nicht oder doch nicht mehr militairpflichtig ist.

b)

4) Wie lange er in Hamburg?
und wo er wohne?

4) *Seit
Zeit dem 12 Juni 1863
Lissau Nr. 107. Hütten 107*

5) Bei welchem Brod- oder Lehr-
herrn derselbe gewesen, oder
womit er sich bisher ernähret?

5)

*Lehrmeister und Landbauhandlung
Handel mit Seidenhand*

Ist der anzunehmende Bürger

a) ein künftiger Handwerker, so muß
er den Zulassungsschein des Herrn
Patrons des Amtes oder der Bräu-
derschaft beibringen.

a)

b) Ist er aus hiesigen Militärdiensten
entlassen, so muß er den Abschied
beibringen.

b)

6) Warum er seinen Geburtsort
verlassen?

6) *Um hier zu bleiben*

7) Ob und wie lange er verheirathet,
ob seine Frau noch am Leben,
und wie viele Kinder er habe
und von welchem Alter?

7)

nein

Oder ob

8) er sich zu verheirathen willens?

8)

wünscht sich zu verheirathen

9) Auf welches Geschäft er Bürger
zu werden willens?

9)

Landbauhandlung

Ist er zum Makler erwählt, so muß
er von der Maklerdeputation einen
Schein beibringen, daß er den
Maklerstock erhalten solle, so bald
er Bürger geworden.

10) Ob er Beweise oder Bescheini-
gungen über diese seine Aus-
sagen beibringen könne?

10)

ja

Wenn der Anzunehmende aus dem Hol-
steinischen oder Dänischen gebürtig ist,
so muß demnächst, nachdem vom
Wohltw. Beddeherrs über seine Zu-
lassung entschieden worden, anoch der
Entlassungsschein der Obrigkeit des
Geburtsortes beigebracht und dem
Beddeherrs vorgelegt werden, ehe die
Beeidigung erfolgen kann. Eben so
wird verfahren, wenn der Anzuneh-
mende vorher aus dem Unterthanen-
verbande seines Vaterlandes entlassen
zu werden wünscht.

W. J. Harrison

Thylen 67

Alfred R. Belmont

1) Geburten von Rodenberg 17 Nov 1857
 2) Tod von ...
 3) ...
 4) ...
 5) ...
 6) ...
 7) ...

1863 Aug. 12 gázol. c. adn. rug. *Artemisia annua* nem
húnygató fűfű

(Preis 4 Schilling.)

N^o 945

Deutsch-Israelitische Gemeinde in Hamburg.

Zulässigkeits-Attest

nach Anleitung des Regulativs vom 23. Januar 1854.

Es wird hiedurch von Seiten der Vorsteher der Deutsch-Israelitischen Gemeinde bescheinigt, daß der Aufnahme des Herrn *Abraham Schickler* geboren *Stodenberg, wozt damir in Altona* Sohn *_____* als Gemeindeglied Nichts entgegensteht.

Derselbe hat die Erklärung abgegeben, daß er *seinen Namen unparirirt läßt*

und *Schickeer* als Familien-Namen für sich und seine Nachkommen feststellt.

Hamburg, den

5 Juli 1863

Der Präses

des Vorsteher-Collegiums der Deutsch-Israelitischen Gemeinde.

Ad. Alexander

M. Haarbleicher

Gem. Secr.

Jewish Congregation accepts Abraham Schickler as a member



Deutsch- Israelitische Gemeinde in Hamburg.

Gemeindefchein

nach Anleitung des Regulativs vom 23. Januar 1854.

Die Vorsteher der Deutsch-Israelitischen Gemeinde bezeugen
hiemit, daß Herr *Abraham Schickler*
am *frühesten* Tag
als Mitglied in die Gemeinde aufgenommen worden ist.

Hamburg, den 22. Octbr 1863

Der Präses

des Vorsteher-Collegiums der Deutsch-Israelitischen Gemeinde.

N^o



948.

ad. Alexander

M. Haarbleicher

Secr. d. Gem.

*Gustav
Geweber
Hamburg*

Death Certificate of Elise Zacharias nee' Samuel

Nr 6032 Eingetragen den 18 November 1872. Bemerkungen

Gestorben: Elise geb. Samuel, Benjamin Zacharias Wittwe,

Todestag: der fünfzigste November 1872.
um 7 1/2 Uhr Morgens

ärztliche Todesbezeugung von A. an der Pöden

Geburtsjahr, Monat, Tag: ungefähr 1896 (gebürtig: Mutter von 1896 geb.)
(Bei Kindern bis zu 8 Tagen: durchlebtes Alter: Tage Stunden.)

Geburtsort: Frankfurt a. M.

Heimathberechtigung: ungefähr Frankfurt

Ort des Sterbefalles }
Wohnort } alt. Hannover 51.

Familienstand: verw. 1896

Gewerbe:
(Bei Kindern bis zu 14 Jahren: Gewerbe des Vaters resp. bei unehelichen der Mutter.)

Vater }
Mutter }
geborene

(Bei Kindern bis zu 14 Jahren: ehelicher oder unehelicher Geburt? (nach Angabe des Geburtscheins.)

überlebend: -- Ehegatt

Gewerbe: --

ob unmündige Kinder vorhanden? --

Angezeigt durch: 1) Dr. J. J.
Vor- und Zunamen W. B. Zacharias
Alter 38 Jahre
Gewerbe Kaufmann
Wohnung alt. Hannover 24.

2)
Vor- und Zunamen
Alter
Gewerbe
Wohnung

An Documenten sind producirt: Geburtschein der Verstorbenen

Die Richtigkeit obiger Anzeigen, so weit solche nicht schon durch Documente attestirt ist, wird durch Unterschrift an Eidesstatt bescheinigt.

C. Fiedgens H. B. Zacharias

Civil Marriage License of Abraham Schickler to Rike Zacharias

N^o 1242

I. Der Bräutigam

- a. Name
- b. Alter
(Der Geburtschein ist zu produciren.)
- c. Religion
- d. Geburtsort, und wie langer in Hamburg
- e. Gewerbe
- f. Wohnung
- g. Datum des Bürgerbriefes
- h. Wenn er verheirathet gewesen:
1. Name der verstorbenen Frau
2. Todestag der Frau
(Der Todtenschein ist zu produciren.)
3. Name, Zahl und Alter der Kinder

I. Abraham Schickler

- a.
- b. 25 J.
- c. jüd.
- d. Rodenberg 12 J.
- e. Kaufmann Reisender
- f. Ellerstrasse Nr. 12.
- g. 23 Octb 1863.
- h. nein

II. 4. Ob die Kinder abgesetzt

- i. Name des Vaters des Bräutigams
- k. Name der Mutter des Bräutigams

4. —

- i. Heinemann Schickler
- k. Doris geb. Samuel

Resolutio

Grafh von
Wied

Actum d.

28 Octb 1863.

1863.

II. Die Braut

- a. Name
- b. Alter
(Der Geburtschein ist zu produciren.)
- c. Religion
- d. Geburtsort, u. wie lange sie in Hamburg
- e. Wohnung
- f. Wenn sie verheirathet gewesen:
 1. Name des ersten Ehemanns
 2. Todesstag
(Der Todtenschein ist zu produciren.)
 3. Name, Zahl und Alter der Kinder

4. Ob die Kinder abgesetzt
- g. Name des Vaters der Braut
- h. Name der Mutter der Braut

III. Consense.

- a. der Eltern
- b. der Vormünder

IV. Grade der Verwandtschaft zwischen den beiden Versprochenen

V. Ob ein noch unerledigtes Eheversprechen früher eingegangen?

VI. Die Proclamation zu

Die Copulation verrichtet Herr *Harald Stern* zu St.

am *7 Novbr 1863.*

Daß Obiges der Wahrheit gemäß, bezeuge ich auf meinen geleisteten

(Unterschrift des Bräutigams.)

A. Spickler

Wir, die unterschriebenen Zeugen übernehmen die Bürgschaft für die Richtigkeit obiger Angaben auf unsern geleisteten Bürgereid.

1.) 1ster Zeuge

L. Siegf. Samson

Bürger seit *2.6 Juni 1862* wohnhaft *Grillen 99*

2.) 2ter Zeuge

Wilhelm Zacharias

W. 11. 67

II

Wilke Zacharias

- a.
- b. *23 J.*
- c. *Jüd*
- d. *Hamburg*
- e. *Neuer Steinweg 78. Neuer Steinweg*
- f. *nam* *78*
- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

4. *am*

- g. *Benjamin Zacharias / Lu*
- h. *Elise geb. Samuel*

III.

- a. *der Mütter der Braut cons. Zustimmung*
- b.

IV.

Halbbrüder / Halbgeschwister

V.

nam *Beschnittener Knabe*

VI.

am 7. Novbr 1863.

Leügar Eid.

Appendix II – Indifference

BENDIX, LUITWEILER & CO.

MEMBERS NEW YORK STOCK EXCHANGE

52 WALL STREET

NEW YORK

TERDAM

18 HEERENGRACHT

CON. E. C. 4

1 KING WILLIAM STREET

CABLE ADDRESS "LUDIX"
"BENLU"

TEL. HANOVER 2-8820

den 18. Januar 1939.

Fraeulein
Hertha Schickler
c/o E.R. Baer
105 Forest Street
Gloversville, N.Y.

Sehr geehrtes Fraeulein Schickler.

Auf Grund Ihres Schreibens vom 14. d.m. habe ich meinem Neffen ein Affidavit uebersandt, das ihn nach meinen Feststellungen vor einer neuerlichen Versendung in das Konzentrationslager schuetzen wird. Mehr bin ich nicht in der Lage, in dieser Angelegenheit tun zu koennen. Mein Neffe muss, wie so viele andere, sich gedulden, bis auf dem Wege internationaler Vereinbarungen ihm die Moeglichkeit gegeben wird, sich und seiner Familie eine neue Existenz aufzubauen. Die Vereinigten Staaten kommen hierfuer nicht in Frage, weil, wie Ihnen bekannt sein duerfte, wir hier bereits unter einem zu grossen Zustrom von Emigranten zu leiden haben.

Hochachtungsvoll



Translation

Bendix, Luitweiler & Co.
Member New York Stock Exchange
52 Wall Street
New York

January 18, 1939

Miss Hertha Schicklder
c/o E.F. Baer
105 Forest Street
Gloversville, NY

Dear Miss Schickler,

In response to your letter of January 14, I have sent my nephew an Affidavit, which to the best of my knowledge will save him from being deported once again to a concentration camp. More than that I am unable to do in this matter. My nephew, along with so many others, will have to be patient until a way can be found via international agreements, to establish for himself and his family, new means of existence. The United States, as you undoubtedly know, cannot do anything in this matter, since we already suffer under too great a flow of immigrants.

Sincerely,

Appendix III – American Consular Documents from US Archives

In 1998, I contacted the National Archives in Washington, DC and among the records of the Department of State a file in the name of Siegbert Gerechter was found. These letters are further proof of the unsympathetic treatment on the part of the consul in Naples.

November 28 1938.

To the American Consular Officer in charge,

Hamburg, Germany.

In his discretion, the Consular Officer in charge is requested, without further report to the Department, to make appropriate acknowledgment of the enclosed communication, dated: September 21, 1938

addressed to: The President.

by: Siegbert Gerechter

of: Hamburg 13,
Parkallee 12.

Subject: Immigration, in order to accompany his wife
and child to the United States.

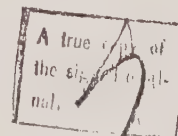
✓
NOV 28 1938

Enclosure:

From Mr. Gerechter,
September 21, 1938.

VD:HSB:EGS:SS

File: 811.111 9.7.42



PLEASE REFER TO

NO. 811.11 - Gerechter, Siegbert & family

RLT:EB



DEPARTMENT OF STATE

ATTACHED:GBG)

RECORDED:GBG)

THE FOREIGN SERVICE
OF THE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

AMERICAN CONSULATE

Naples, Italy, March 7, 1940

Mr. Siegbert Gerechter,
Rruga Achille Starace,
Durazzo, Albania.

Sir:

Reference is made to your letter dated February 22, 1940, inquiring with regard to the status of your application for an immigration visa.

I have now received new documents on your behalf, but they are not fully in accord with the advice given in my letter dated January 31, 1940. For example, your sponsor, Mr. Abraham D. Lurie, has not explained in any detail the reasons for his interest in your welfare, and I am herewith enclosing a form outlining questions which he may wish to answer on this point.

Furthermore, your relatives Erich Baer, Lotte Baer and Hertha Schickler did not submit complete transcripts of their bank accounts. It is noted that all your relatives are in receipt of very modest incomes. It will, therefore, be necessary for them to prove that they have adequate personal savings to assure your support.

Very respectfully yours,,

For : Thomas D. Bowman,
American Consul General

Ray L. Thurston,
American Vice Consul.

Enclosure: Form R.R.D.

515.11 - GERECHTER, Siegbert
RECEIVED

GENERAL

Naples, Italy, March 8, 1940.

Mr. Albert M. Cohen,
1940 Philadelphia Saving
Fund Building,
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Original mailed
APR 5 1940
J.D.

SIR:

I have received your letter dated February 5, 1940, in connection with the application for immigration visas of Mr. Siegbert Gerechter and his family now residing in Durazzo, Albania.

For your information, I am herewith enclosing a copy of the most recent letter sent by this office to the applicants. You are assured that any new evidence to show that these persons will not become public charges in the United States will be carefully considered.

Very respectfully yours,

Thomas D. Bowman,
American Consul General.

Enclosure: Copy of letter as stated.

FILED
APR 9 1940

515.11
GERECHTER, Siegbert
JUN 1 1940

Appendix IV – Historic Documentation of Albanian Effort to Save Jews

Translation from the original text in Italian, of an excerpt from a book by Francesco Jacomoni

“A demonstration on the part of Mustafa Kruja, head of the Albanian government during the Italian occupation, of his capacity to face situations with courage and magnanimity. The following incident occurred shortly after he assumed the presidency of the Council of State.

The German Consul had approached Mr. Kruja, presenting him with a request from the Nazi Government. They demanded that the Albanian Government hand over more than 300 Jews who had fled from Yugoslavia and who had found asylum in Albania. The German military commander in Belgrade had furnished precise lists with names and exact locations where these Jews had fled to in Kosovo. Mustafa Kruja came to me to request permission to leave these Jews undisturbed in Albania. There were no German soldiers in the country that could identify these Jews. It was decided that these Jewish refugees be immediately transferred to the region of Gjirkaster which was in the Greek zone, occupied by the Italian military. They were furnished with Albanian passports and with false names. Where necessary they were given financial assistance as well.

I gave Kruja permission to carry out these measures and to respond to the German Consul that after thorough investigation in Kosovo, all efforts resulted in nothing.

This incident was not officially reported to Rome, however in private, it was conveyed to Minister Vidau. He was a man with heart, and with his help our foreign representatives had furnished Albanian passports to German, Polish, Hungarian, Romanian and Bohemian Jews. They could thereby save themselves from racial persecution and come to Albania.”

Appendix V – Geneology Tree

Descendants of Hertz Zacharias

Generation No. 1

1. HERTZ¹ ZACHARIAS He married TREINDEL LEVY.

Child of HERTZ ZACHARIAS and TREINDEL LEVY is:

2. i. BENJAMIN² ZACHARIAS, b. 1796, Frankfurt; d. December 28, 1872, Hamburg, Germany.

Generation No. 2

2. BENJAMIN² ZACHARIAS (HERTZ¹) was born 1796 in Frankfurt, and died December 28, 1872 in Hamburg, Germany. He married ELISSE SAMUEL. She was born 1796 in Frankfurt, and died November 17, 1872 in Hamburg, Germany.

Children of BENJAMIN ZACHARIAS and ELISSE SAMUEL are:

3. i. FRIEDERIKE (RIKE)³ ZACHARIAS, b. 1840, Hamburg, Germany.
ii. WOLFF BENJAMIN ZACHARIAS.

Generation No. 3

3. FRIEDERIKE (RIKE)³ ZACHARIAS (BENJAMIN², HERTZ¹) was born 1840 in Hamburg, Germany. She married ABRAHAM SCHICKLER November 18, 1863 in Hamburg, son of HEINEMANN SCHICKLER and DORIS SAMUEL. He was born November 17, 1837 in Rodenberg, Germany.

More About FRIEDERIKE (RIKE) ZACHARIAS:

Burial: Langenfelde, Hamburg

More About ABRAHAM SCHICKLER:

Burial: Langenfelde, Hamburg

More About ABRAHAM SCHICKLER and FRIEDERIKE ZACHARIAS:

Marriage: November 18, 1863, Hamburg

Children of FRIEDERIKE ZACHARIAS and ABRAHAM SCHICKLER are:

4. i. SAMUEL⁴ SCHICKLER, b. April 29, 1876, Hamburg, Germany.
ii. ADOLPH SCHICKLER.
5. iii. CAESER SCHICKLER.
6. iv. DORA SCHICKLER, b. January 2, 1864.
7. v. ELLA SCHICKLER, b. January 1, 1879.
8. vi. FANNY SCHICKLER, b. October 31, 1873; d. January 13, 1913, Hamburg, Germany.
vii. HERMAN SCHICKLER.

More About HERMAN SCHICKLER:

Burial: Langenfelde, Hamburg

9. viii. JOHN SCHICKLER.

10. ix. THERESA SCHICKLER, b. January 21, 1879.

Generation No. 4

4. SAMUEL⁴ SCHICKLER (*FRIEDERIKE (RIKE)*³ *ZACHARIAS, BENJAMIN*², *HERTZ*¹) was born April 29, 1876 in Hamburg, Germany. He married LOUISE LEWIN 1903, daughter of ABRAHAM LEWIN and MINNA LESSER. She was born November 15, 1877 in Posen, and died 1908.

More About SAMUEL SCHICKLER:

Burial: Langenfelde, Hamburg

More About SAMUEL SCHICKLER and LOUISE LEWIN:

Marriage: 1903

Children of SAMUEL SCHICKLER and LOUISE LEWIN are:

- 11. i. ALICE⁵ SCHICKLER, b. December 11, 1903, Hamburg, Germany; d. March 30, 1961, Boston.
- 12. ii. LOTTE SCHICKLER, b. November 15, 1907, Hamburg, Germany; d. 2000, New York.
- iii. HERTHA SCHICKLER, b. April 21, 1906, Hamburg, Germany; d. March 1996, New York.

5. CAESER⁴ SCHICKLER (*FRIEDERIKE (RIKE)*³ *ZACHARIAS, BENJAMIN*², *HERTZ*¹) He married FANNY MEYER.

More About CAESER SCHICKLER:

Burial: Lagenfelde, Hamburg

Children of CAESER SCHICKLER and FANNY MEYER are:

- i. ARTHUR⁵ SCHICKLER, m. SETTY SCHICKLER.

More About ARTHUR SCHICKLER:

Comment 1: September 14, 1943, Deported to Auschwitz

More About SETTY SCHICKLER:

Comment 1: September 14, 1943, Deported to Auschwitz

- ii. ERWIN SCHICKLER, d. 1968; m. HANNA SCHICKLER; d. 1962.
- 13. iii. VERA DANIEL SCHICKLER, d. January 1998.

6. DORA⁴ SCHICKLER (*FRIEDERIKE (RIKE)*³ *ZACHARIAS, BENJAMIN*², *HERTZ*¹) was born January 2, 1864. She married LEOPOLD SALOMON.

More About DORA SCHICKLER:

Comment 1: July 15, 1942, Deported to Theresienstadt

Comment 2: September 23, 1942, Deported to Minsk

Child of DORA SCHICKLER and LEOPOLD SALOMON is:

- i. PAULA⁵ KATZ.

7. ELLA⁴ SCHICKLER (*FRIEDERIKE (RIKE)*³ *ZACHARIAS, BENJAMIN*², *HERTZ*¹) was born January 1, 1879. She married ISAAK EDUARD MAYER.

More About ELLA SCHICKLER:

Comment 1: July 15, 1942, Deported to Theresienstadt

Child of ELLA SCHICKLER and ISAAK MAYER is:

- 14. i. GERDA⁵ MAYER.

8. FANNY⁴ SCHICKLER (*FRIEDERIKE (RIKE)*³ *ZACHARIAS, BENJAMIN*², *HERTZ*¹) was born October 31, 1873, and died January 13, 1913 in Hamburg, Germany. She married MARCUS LISSAUER, son of MOSES LISSAUER and BETTY PRENZLAU. He was born November 1, 1859 in Lubeck, and died November 30, 1928 in Hamburg, Germany.

More About FANNY SCHICKLER:

Burial: Langenfelde, Hamburg

More About MARCUS LISSAUER:

Fact 1: Buried Langenfelde

Children of FANNY SCHICKLER and MARCUS LISSAUER are:

- i. ADOLPH⁵ LISSAUER.
- ii. BETTY LISSAUER.
- iii. HERMAN LISSAUER.
- iv. MORITZ LISSAUER, m. PAULA HOROWITZ.
- v. PAUL LISSAUER, m. KATE MENDER.

9. JOHN⁴ SCHICKLER (*FRIEDERIKE (RIKE)*³ *ZACHARIAS, BENJAMIN*², *HERTZ*¹) He married BERTHA JANOVER.

More About JOHN SCHICKLER:

Comment 1: July 19, 1942, Deported to Theresienstadt

Children of JOHN SCHICKLER and BERTHA JANOVER are:

- i. EDITH⁵ SCHICKLER, b. March 11, 1911.

More About EDITH SCHICKLER:

Comment 1: December 2, 1943, Deported to Auschwitz

- ii. FANNY SCHICKLER, b. August 20, 1913.

More About FANNY SCHICKLER:

Comment 1: December 2, 1943, Deported to Auschwitz

10. THERESA⁴ SCHICKLER (*FRIEDERIKE (RIKE)*³ *ZACHARIAS, BENJAMIN*², *HERTZ*¹) was born January 21, 1879. She married SIEGMUND MEYER.

More About THERESA SCHICKLER:

Comment 1: July 19, 1942, Deported to Theresienstadt

Child of THERESA SCHICKLER and SIEGMUND MEYER is:

- i. ALBERT⁵ MEYER, d. World War I.

Generation No. 5

11. ALICE⁵ SCHICKLER (*SAMUEL*⁴, *FRIEDERIKE (RIKE)*³ *ZACHARIAS, BENJAMIN*², *HERTZ*¹) was born December 11, 1903 in Hamburg, Germany, and died March 30, 1961 in Boston. She married SIEGBERT ZODEK GERECHTER, son of LOUIS GERECHTER and ANNA CHAIM. He was born October 14, 1895 in Posen, and died February 4, 1961 in New York.

Notes for SIEGBERT ZODEK GERECHTER:

Was an officer in the German army in a machine gun division. Served on the front lines for four years and received the Hitler Cross in 1935.

Fought against the Bolsheviks in Russia until February 1919.

More About SIEGBERT ZODEK GERECHTER:

Military service: 1917, Received the Iron Cross for Front Line Fighters

Child of ALICE SCHICKLER and SIEGBERT GERECHTER is:

15. i. JOHANNA JUTTA⁶ GERECHTER, b. December 2, 1930, Hamburg Germany.

12. LOTTE⁵ SCHICKLER (*SAMUEL⁴, FRIEDERIKE (RIKE)³ ZACHARIAS, BENJAMIN², HERTZ¹*) was born November 15, 1907 in Hamburg, Germany, and died 2000 in New York. She married ERIC BAER.

Child of LOTTE SCHICKLER and ERIC BAER is:

16. i. STEVEN⁶ BAER, b. April 24, 1936.

13. VERA DANIEL⁵ SCHICKLER (*CAESER⁴, FRIEDERIKE (RIKE)³ ZACHARIAS, BENJAMIN², HERTZ¹*) died January 1998. She married HANS DANIEL.

Child of VERA SCHICKLER and HANS DANIEL is:

i. SUSAN⁶ DANIEL.

14. GERDA⁵ MAYER (*ELLA⁴ SCHICKLER, FRIEDERIKE (RIKE)³ ZACHARIAS, BENJAMIN², HERTZ¹*) She married JOSEPH BACHARACH.

Children of GERDA MAYER and JOSEPH BACHARACH are:

17. i. ALFRED⁶ BACHARACH.

18. ii. DAVID BACHARACH.

19. iii. MARION BACHARACH.

Generation No. 6

15. JOHANNA JUTTA⁶ GERECHTER (*ALICE⁵ SCHICKLER, SAMUEL⁴, FRIEDERIKE (RIKE)³ ZACHARIAS, BENJAMIN², HERTZ¹*) was born December 2, 1930 in Hamburg Germany. She married HELMUT DAVID NEUMANN June 1, 1952 in New York NY USA, son of SAMUEL NEUMANN and BETTY STOLL. He was born February 6, 1926 in Nordlingen Germany.

More About HELMUT NEUMANN and JOHANNA GERECHTER:

Marriage: June 1, 1952, New York NY USA

Children of JOHANNA GERECHTER and HELMUT NEUMANN are:

20. i. RUTHIE TEKLA⁷ NEUMANN, b. February 3, 1955, Boston, MA.

21. ii. ELIOT SAMUEL NEUMANN, b. September 2, 1957, Boston MA USA.

22. iii. BENJAMIN JEHUDA NEUMANN, b. January 5, 1959, Boston, MA.

iv. ARIE ZADOK NEUMANN, b. August 1, 1961, Boston, MA; m. GAYLE KASS, August 20, 2000, Long Island, New York.

More About ARIE NEUMANN and GAYLE KASS:

Marriage: August 20, 2000, Long Island, New York

16. STEVEN⁶ BAER (*LOTTE⁵ SCHICKLER, SAMUEL⁴, FRIEDERIKE (RIKE)³ ZACHARIAS; BENJAMIN², HERTZ¹*) was born April 24, 1936. He married (1) LINDA KASSED June 1960. He married (2) JUDY TARAIL May 1977. He married (3) MARTHA BAER October 1989.

More About STEVEN BAER and LINDA KASSED:

Marriage: June 1960

More About STEVEN BAER and JUDY TARAIL:
Marriage: May 1977

More About STEVEN BAER and MARTHA BAER:
Marriage: October 1989

Children of STEVEN BAER and LINDA KASSED are:

23. i. WENDY⁷ BAER.
- ii. ADAM BAER.
- iii. DAVID BAER, m. LEAH BAER.

17. ALFRED⁶ BACHARACH (*GERDA*⁵ *MAYER*, *ELLA*⁴ *SCHICKLER*, *FRIEDERIKE (RIKE)*³ *ZACHARIAS*, *BENJAMIN*², *HERTZ*¹)
He married MARLENE BACHARACH.

Children of ALFRED BACHARACH and MARLENE BACHARACH are:

- i. JASON⁷ BACHARACH.
- ii. SANDER BACHARACH.

18. DAVID⁶ BACHARACH (*GERDA*⁵ *MAYER*, *ELLA*⁴ *SCHICKLER*, *FRIEDERIKE (RIKE)*³ *ZACHARIAS*, *BENJAMIN*², *HERTZ*¹)
He married CHERYL BACHARACH.

Children of DAVID BACHARACH and CHERYL BACHARACH are:

- i. DARIN⁷ BACHARACH.
- ii. DEBORAH BACHARACH.

19. MARION⁶ BACHARACH (*GERDA*⁵ *MAYER*, *ELLA*⁴ *SCHICKLER*, *FRIEDERIKE (RIKE)*³ *ZACHARIAS*, *BENJAMIN*², *HERTZ*¹)
She married PHILIP KATZ.

Children of MARION BACHARACH and PHILIP KATZ are:

- i. ELISE⁷ KATZ.
- ii. ERIC KATZ.
- iii. STACI KATZ.

Generation No. 7

20. RUTHIE TEKLA⁷ NEUMANN (*JOHANNA JUTTA*⁶ *GERECHTER*, *ALICE*⁵ *SCHICKLER*, *SAMUEL*⁴, *FRIEDERIKE (RIKE)*³ *ZACHARIAS*, *BENJAMIN*², *HERTZ*¹) was born February 3, 1955 in Boston, MA. She married MURRAY PLATT July 31, 1977 in Southfield, MI, son of HAROLD PLATT and MICHELLE. He was born May 11, 1951 in Detroit, MI.

More About MURRAY PLATT and RUTHIE NEUMANN:
Marriage: July 31, 1977, Southfield, MI

Children of RUTHIE NEUMANN and MURRAY PLATT are:

- i. DANIEL SHLOMO⁸ PLATT, b. October 23, 1979.
- ii. Yael ESTHER PLATT, b. March 4, 1981.
- iii. AVIGAIL CHASIA-MALKA PLATT, b. November 26, 1984.
- iv. NOAH BATYA PLATT, b. July 24, 1986.
- v. MERAV PLATT, b. July 29, 1988.

21. ELIOT SAMUEL⁷ NEUMANN (*JOHANNA JUTTA*⁶ *GERECHTER*, *ALICE*⁵ *SCHICKLER*, *SAMUEL*⁴, *FRIEDERIKE (RIKE)*³ *ZACHARIAS*, *BENJAMIN*², *HERTZ*¹) was born September 2, 1957 in Boston MA USA. He married (1) LYNN ANNE MAYER June 17, 1984 in Columbus, Ohio, daughter of ROBERT MAYER and INA FELD. She was born June 27, 1962 in Baltimore, MD. He married (2) MARJORIE L. COONIN October 29, 1995 in Clarksville, MD. She was born September 19, 1957 in Baltimore, MD.

More About ELIOT NEUMANN and LYNN MAYER:

Divorce: 1989, Fairfax, VA

Marriage: June 17, 1984, Columbus, Ohio

More About ELIOT NEUMANN and MARJORIE COONIN:

Marriage: October 29, 1995, Clarksville, MD

Child of ELIOT NEUMANN and LYNN MAYER is:

- i. ADRIANA LEAH⁸ NEUMANN, b. February 10, 1988, Jerusalem, Israel.

Child of ELIOT NEUMANN and MARJORIE COONIN is:

- ii. JAMIE LEAL⁸ NEUMANN, b. July 30, 1999, Baltimore, MD.

22. BENJAMIN JEHUDA⁷ NEUMANN (*JOHANNA JUTTA⁶ GERECHTER, ALICE⁵ SCHICKLER, SAMUEL⁴, FRIEDERIKE (RIKE)³ ZACHARIAS, BENJAMIN², HERTZ¹*) was born January 5, 1959 in Boston, MA. He married ELLEN TERI KATZ September 5, 1982 in Southfield, MI. She was born August 28, 1955.

More About BENJAMIN NEUMANN and ELLEN KATZ:

Marriage: September 5, 1982, Southfield, MI

Children of BENJAMIN NEUMANN and ELLEN KATZ are:

- i. SARAH BET-EL⁸ NEUMANN, b. August 22, 1984.
- ii. ZACHARY CHAIM NEUMANN, b. March 16, 1987.
- iii. MAX HILLEL NEUMANN, b. March 25, 1990.

23. WENDY⁷ BAER (*STEVEN⁶, LOTTE⁵ SCHICKLER, SAMUEL⁴, FRIEDERIKE (RIKE)³ ZACHARIAS, BENJAMIN², HERTZ¹*) She married MICHAEL SCHRAMM.

Children of WENDY BAER and MICHAEL SCHRAMM are:

- i. NATHAN⁸ SCHRAMM.
- ii. NOAH SCHRAMM.

Some of those who were in Albania with us,

I do not remember everyone...

Fritz Kraus, Katerina Kraus, Gertrude Kraus – Fredericke Kraus, mother of Fritz

Heinrich Stern and his wife (do not know her first name), she was the sister of Fritz Kraus and therefore the daughter of Friedericke Kraus.

Mr. Galitzky

Mr. And Mrs. Fritz Weinstein

Fritz Altman

Hans Krall, Anni Krall and her sister, Olga Stutecka

Josef Gertler

Siegbert Gerechter, Alice Gerechter, Johanna Jutta Gerechter

Walter Mandel, Finny Mandel and her mother, Mrs. Tchatcher

Menashe Wolff, Resel Wolff, Julius Wolff

Mr. Horn

Mr. And Mrs Tau

Dr. Leo Meyer, Edith Meyer, Hannelore Meyer, Eva Meyer, Alexander Meyer

Emiel Borger, Stella Borger (they came later, probably from Yugoslavia)

Mr. Jacobson (came from East Prussia)

Encounter - Written by Thekla Stoll, June 1942

Deported to Auschwitz, March 8, 1943

Published in the Aufbau No. 25 – December 4, 1998

Begegnung

Ich sah heut' tausend Menschen verstörten Angesichts,
Ich sah heut' tausend Juden, die wanderten ins Nichts.
Im Grau des kalten Morgens zog die verfehnte Schar,
Und hinter ihr verblaßte, was einst ihr Leben war.

Sie schritten durch die, Pforten und wußten: "Nie zurück!"
Und ließen alles draußen, die Ehre, Geltung, Glück.
"Wohin wird man Euch führen? Wo endet Euer Pfad?"
Sie wissen nur das eine: Das Ziel heißt Stacheldraht.

Und was dort ihrer wartet, sind Elend, Qual und Not,
Entbehrung, Seuche, Hunger, für viele bitterer Tod.
Ich such' in ihrem Auge mit brüderlichem Blick,
Erwartend tiefsten Jammer ab solchem Mißgeschick.

Doch statt Verzweiflung sah ich ein tiefes, tiefes Müh'n
Um Haltung, um Beherrschung, aus ihren Augen glüh'n,
Sah heißen Lebenswillen, sah Haltung Und sah Mut,
Und gar in manchem Antlitz ein Lächeln, stark und gut.

Da hab' ich tief ergriffen den Geist des Volks erkannt,
Das, auserwählt zum Leiden, das Leid noch stets gebannt,
Das sich aus Not und Elend, Verbannung, Acht und Haft
Noch immer hat erhoben mit ungebrochener Kraft.

Ich sah heut tausend Menschen verstörten Angesichts
Und sah im Grau des Morgens – den Strahl des ew' gen Lichts.

Thekla Stoll, Juni 1942

(verschleppt nach Auschwitz am 8. März 1943)

Encounter

I saw today thousands with distorted complexions,
Saw thousands of Jews going into oblivion.
This wretched crowd left in the dark of night,
And behind them faded what were once their lives.

They walked through gates and knew of 'no return'
They left behind their honor, happiness, their repute
What is the end of your path? I inquire
They only knew the destination was barbed wire.

What waits for you there is torture, hell, great need,
Deprivation, sickness, hunger – for many a bitter demise
I search in their eyes with great sympathy,
Expecting deep misery for such a calamity.

Instead of despair I saw deep, deep try
For self respect and control glow in their eyes.
I saw a strong will to live, a courageous attitude
And in some faces even a smile, so strong, so good.

Deeply touched I recognized the soul of the people,
Which though elected for suffering, always distress knew to escape
Which from plight, hell, exile, outlaw and prison
With unscathed strength always has risen.

I saw today thousands with distorted features,
But saw in the dawn – the ray of the Eternal Creator.

Thekla Stoll, June 1942
(deported to Aushwitz, March 8, 1943)
Translated from German

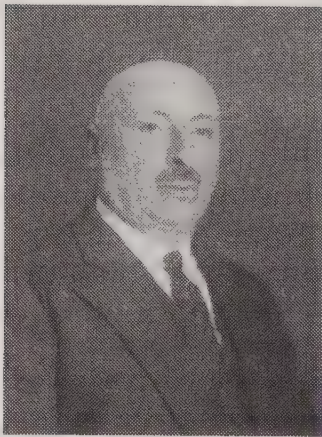
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FAMILY PHOTOS



Grandmother Anna Gerechter - with Siegbert
(my father), Arthur and Paula -
Posen - circa 1908

FAMILY PHOTOS



Grandfather Louis Gerechter
Berlin - circa 1933



Grandfather Samuel Schickler
Hamburg - 1923



Grandmother Schickler, her sister
Hedwig Gutheil, her mother, Minna Lewin
and Alice, Hertha and Lotte - near Hamburg



Alice Gerechter (my mother)
Hamburg 1938

FAMILY PHOTOS



Our home in Shkoset near Durazzo
My father, Siegbert Gerechter, Mrs. Lisa Lotte
Pilku, Johanna Jutta Gerechter, Alice Gerechter
and our dog Piccolo - April 12, 1943



My parents- Alice and Siegbert Gerechter
Shkoset, near Durazzo - April 1943

FAMILY PHOTOS

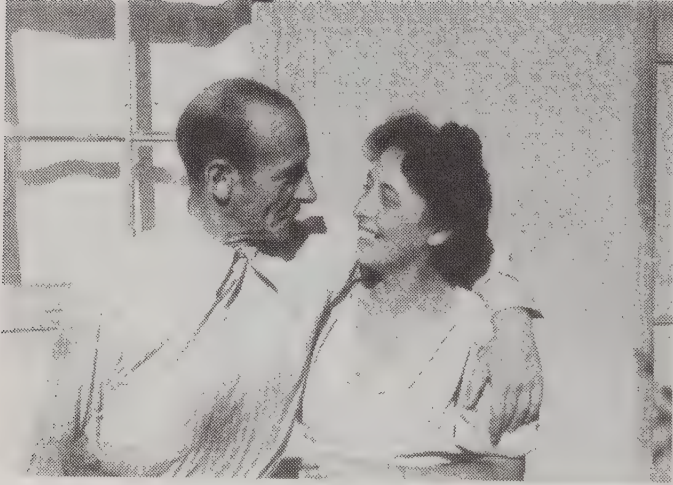


The Gerechter Family, our dog - at the window
of our one-room apartment - Shkoset 4/12/1943



Durazzo, 1943 - from left: Luan Pilku, Lisa Lotte
Pilku, Ing. Njazi Pilku, Alice and Jutta Gerechter,
unknown girl.

FAMILY PHOTOS



My parents, Siegbert and Alice Gerechter
Tirana - August 1944



My mother and I, Alice and Jutta Gerechter
Tirana - August 1944



On the Ship to Freedom - The survivors from
Albania, on the way to Brindisi -
September 28/29, 1945



Our arrival in New York - at last reunited with
grandmother Schickler - my mother and I
September 18, 1946

FAMILY PHOTOS



My father - Siegbert Gerechter
New York, Winter 1947/48



Oma Schickler with her two grandchildren -
Stephen Baer and Johanna Jutta (Gerechter)
Neumann



This picture was taken at Arie and Gayle's wedding
August 20, 2000

This is our family - Top row from left: Daniel Platt, Avigail Platt, Sarah Neumann, Benjy Neumann, Ellie Neumann, Eli Neumann, Margie Neumann, Adriana Neumann, Randi Hoffman and Ricky Hoffman.

Second row from left: Max Neumann, Zachary Neumann, Arie Neumann, Gayle Neumann, Johanna Neumann, David Neumann, Ruthie Platt, Murray Platt & Yael Platt.

Front row from left: Noa Platt, Merav Platt & Jamie Neumann.

"WHOEVER SAVES A SINGLE LIFE IS AS IF ONE SAVES
THE ENTIRE WORLD" - TALMUD

